

## **SPECIAL MEETING**

### **CRANSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

**THURSDAY, JANUARY 3, 2008**

**CRANSTON HIGH SCHOOL WEST AUDITORIUM**

**80 METROPOLITAN AVENUE**

**EXECUTIVE SESSION: 5:30 P.M.**

**PUBLIC SESSION: 7:00 P.M.**

## **MINUTES**

A special meeting of the Cranston School Committee was held on the evening of the above date at Cranston High School West in the auditorium with the following members present: Mr. Archetto, Mrs. Greifer, Ms. Iannazzi, Mr. Lombardi, Mr. Stycos, Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway, and Mr. Traficante. Also present were Mr. Scherza and Mr. Nero.

The meeting was called to order at 5:33 p.m. It was moved by Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway, seconded by Mr. Lombardi and unanimously carried that the meeting adjourn to Executive Session pursuant to Rhode Island State Laws 42-46-5(a)(1) Personnel and PL 42-46-5(a)(2) Collective Bargaining and Litigation (possible litigation – Caruolo Action.)

### **I. Call to Order – Public Session**

**Chairman Traficante reconvened the meeting at 7:00 p.m.**

**The roll was called and the Pledge of Allegiance conducted.**

**Chairman Traficante noted that no votes were taken in Executive Session.**

## **II. Executive Session Minutes Sealed – January 3, 2008**

**Moved by Mr. Lombardi, seconded by Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway and unanimously carried that the January 3, 2008 Executive Session minutes remain confidential.**

## **III. Public Acknowledgements/Communications**

**Chairman Traficante stated that in May 2007 the Cranston School Committee, by unanimous vote, established a Middle School Sub-Committee. Appointed Chair of that committee was Chairwoman Deborah Greifer from Ward 2. Mrs. Greifer would be called upon very shortly to address the public regarding the mission, composition, general research, and the final resolution of that particular sub-committee. Following Mrs. Greifer, he stated that he would present a capital budget presentation and describe in general terms the impact of the two models, whether the 6th grade is housed at the elementary level or the middle school level, and the impact it will have**

upon the future capital budget. That will be followed by Assistant Superintendent Peter Nero with the

Page 2      January 3, 2008

assistance of the three middle school principals to present the majority report of that sub-committee. Mr. Nero would be followed by two minority reports, one by CTA representatives, Mrs. Liz Larkin and Mr. Kenneth Bowling, who are members of that sub-committee as well, and a second minority report by Mrs. Barbara Gordon and Mr. Michael Stanton, two of the three parents who served on that committee. The third parent, Mrs. Ann Marie Simeone, voted with the majority. Following the minority report, Superintendent Scherza would make concluding remarks along with the middle school principals. During the public portion of the meeting tonight, there will be no interruptions, no questions, and no comments during the presentations. He expected complete order and decorum from everyone. Everyone has an opinion, and there opinions would be respected. The hearing would then be opened to the public, and Cranston residents would be allowed to speak first followed by interested parties. Ms. Iannazzi, the Vice Chair of the committee, would control the public speaking portion of the agenda. Public speakers would be allowed three minutes each. He asked them to state their name and address for the record. If anyone had written comments, upon completion of their comments, he asked them to turn them into the clerk. No vote would be taken this evening.

**Perhaps a vote may be taken on January 14th which will be held in this auditorium at 7:00 p.m. on this same issue. There is an 11:00 p.m. curfew, and unless the committee suspends the rules, the committee would adjourn the meeting at 11:00 p.m. Research by the committee was quite extensive and detailed. Everyone would have an opportunity to speak either tonight or on January 14th. There is an awful lot of information to be presented. Mr. Traficante called upon Mrs. Greifer to give the sub-committee's report.**

#### **IV. Chairperson Communications**

##### **a. Middle School Sub-Committee Report to School Committee on Their Findings**

**Mrs. Greifer gave an overview on the sub-committee's work. Others would go into more detail on some of the findings. At the end of May 2007, the School Committee passed a resolution that created this sub-committee. The mission of this committee is as follows: The committee shall examine and make recommendations concerning the current middle school class grouping levels of above grade, on grade level, and working toward grade level. The committee shall also examine and make recommendations concerning the under-representation of boys, blacks, Asians, Hispanics, and low income children in more challenging classes in both middle and high schools. The committee shall look at the restructuring of the middle school with the focus on going to a 7th and 8th grade model.**

**The composition of the committee was also outlined in that resolution, and the members were two teachers, at least one of whom will be a middle school teacher appointed by the Cranston Teachers' Alliance. Those two teachers were Mrs. Lizbeth Larkin, the**

**Page 3      January 3, 2008**

**Vice President of the Cranston Teachers' Alliance, and Mr. Kenneth Bowling, a technology teacher at Park View Middle School. Two administrators, at least one of whom will be a middle school principal appointed by the Superintendent, and those members were Mr. Peter Nero, Assistant Superintendent and former principal at Western Hills Middle School, and Mr. Jay DeCristofaro, principal at Park View Middle School. There were three members of the School Committee selected by the Chairman with one representative from the eastern side of the City and one representative from the western side of the City. Those members were herself, Mr. Steven Stycos from the eastern side of the City and Ms. Andrea Iannazzi from the western part of the City. There were three parents who have children in Cranston middle schools. Parents were chosen in the following way: divide the School Committee into three groups, one group the Park View district is the Ward 1 and 2 members; a second group the Bain district is represented by Ward 3 and committee citywide representative, and the third group Western Hills district is Wards 4 and 6 members. Each group would then select one parent to be on**

the committee from their middle school. The parent representative for the Park View district is Barbara Gordon, and Mr. Stycos and herself chose Michael Stanton as an alternate. The sub-committee sent out a letter asking for parent volunteers to be on this committee. The Bain district received one reply who was Tammy Donnelly, and she subsequently was unable to fulfill to the committee due to a change in her work schedule. The third member from the Western Hills district was Ann Marie Simeone.

Mrs. Greifer continued that due to budgetary and logistical considerations, the committee decided early on that it had to consider the 6th grade question first. Mr. Nero presented the administration's proposal of housing the 6th graders in the elementary schools beginning in the 08-09 school year citing reasons behind the proposal such as overcrowding in the middle schools, the need to proceed with capital projects, and the need to effect cost savings in the district, among other things. It became clear early on that studies would not be able to tell them where 6th graders belonged. There are countless studies that find that they do best at the elementary school or at the middle school level from configurations from K-5 to 6-8 to K-8, and all kinds of combinations. They were not going to get the guidance they had hoped to get from studies. So, they needed to determine what was best for the Cranston 6th graders. They sent out a parent survey to the 4th through 8th grade parents asking where they thought the 6th grade should be. They sent out a little over 4,000 questionnaires and

received 1,215 responses which is quite a lot. Among elementary parents, 64% either strongly or mostly agreed that 6th grade belonged in elementary school while among middle school parents, 51% mostly or strongly disagreed. The parent total between elementary and middle school parents was 58% for and 42% against the 6th grade in elementary school. The committee believed that in order to reach a recommendation it needs to have a reasonable idea of what the model might look like both to judge the advisability of a move and to be able to determine what the cost savings might be. The administration conducted a space availability survey in the elementary schools. Middle school

Page 4      January 3, 2008

principals came up with some hypothetical scheduling scenarios to try to determine staffing needs and possible cost savings. They did discuss such things as teacher certifications, instructional time, lunch scheduling, and population projections among other issues.

After five months of meetings, the committee voted on a recommendation to present to the School Committee as a whole. The question presented was, "Should the 6th grade return to the elementary schools?" The vote was six yes, four no, and one abstention. Mrs. Greifer stated that she was the abstention because she felt that this committee still had work to do on other issues, and she needed to maintain her neutrality at the committee level.

At this point, Mrs. Greifer turned the presentation over to Mr. Traficante who presented a power point presentation on the Capital Budget. A copy of his presentation can be accessed at <http://cpsed.net/news> .

Mr. Nero presented the Majority Report of the Middle School Sub-Committee. A copy of his presentation can be accessed at <http://cpsed.net/news> . He was assisted by Mr. Thomas Barbieri, Principal of Bain Middle School, Mrs. Norma Cole, Principal of Western Hills Middle School, Mr. Jay DeCristofaro, Principal of Park View Middle School, and Mr. Joseph Potemri, Assistant Principal of Park View Middle School.

Chairman Traficante stated that the vote on the sub-committee was six in favor, four opposed and one abstention. The dissenting votes would present a minority report. He called upon Mr. Kenneth Bowling and Mrs. Liz Larkin to present the minority report on behalf of the Cranston Teachers' Alliance.

Mr. Bowling and Mrs. Larkin presented a power point presentation, and a copy of their report is available at the Cranston School Committee office.

Mr. Bowling commented that he and Mrs. Larkin represented the Cranston Teachers' Alliance on this sub-committee that was

convened in August 2007.

He stated that their first major concern is a lack of specific planning and discussion prior to adopting to what they believe is this hasty plan. Mrs. Larkin indicated that when grade 6 originally moved to the middle school, the move was implemented over a three-year planning period. That move was methodically orchestrated and well planned. Actually, there are many administrators and teachers still involved in the move now that were helpful and put forth the initiatives to make that move all those years ago. This move has been rushed, and very early on in the study committee, it was established and determined to be founded in economics and not in academics.

Page 5      January 3, 2008

Mr. Bowling stated that the sub-committee had twelve meetings to date which began in August 2007. There was much discussion, many ideas, but no plan ever came to the table. Finally, on December 5th, the eleventh of their twelfth meeting, a set of scenarios was revealed that they were supposed to research, evaluate, scrutinize, and vote on at their very next meeting. This was hardly prudent planning from his point of view; here are our ideas, so let's vote. Then to add insult to injury, on the 12th of December, the day the committee was suppose to vote, a fourth scenario was added. Again the

administration's lack of respect for their members' opinions was once again brought to the floor. This committee did not do due diligence with regard to program impact, truthful and verifiable financial impact on the system, and they had no chance to really verify these numbers. The questions still remain unanswered. What do these changes really have to do with the 6th grade. There is the absence of evidence that the implementation of this plan has any educational benefits. Mrs. Larkin stated that the people in favor of this move have never presented the evidence that would prove that this would be a beneficial move for our 6th graders. They do have evidence in the City's middle schools today that teaming creates small schools within a larger community and that each school with its individual cultures are flourishing.

Mr. Bowling said that when it comes to current test scores at the three middle schools, all three middle school under the No Child Left Behind standards are highly performing. Western Hills currently has a target of 73 in the English Language Arts, and their actual score was 90.1; the State scored an 84.7. With regard to math scores, the target was 55.1; the actual score was 83.5, and the State was 79.3. At Bain, the target was 73.3, and Bain came in at 86.2; the State was 84.7. In mathematics, the target was 55.1; 76.6 was Bain's actual; the State was 79.3. At Park View, the standard target stays the same, 73.3, and Park View came in at 85.5; the state was 84.7. In mathematics, the target was 55.1; they scored at 79.2; the State was 79.3. Park View is listed as high performing with caution, and that

caution goes directly to their population of English Language Learners and students with disabilities. 25 out of 27 targets were met. This is hardly what he considers to be the black hole of what middle school education is in Cranston. That was the description used by the Superintendent at the only meeting of the sub-committee that he attended. Black hole is not what they do; they do a professional job, and the test scores will bear it out.

Mr. Bowling went on to say that the next major concern is the inequity that will be caused for some schools by displacing Kindergarten and 6th grade students. Mrs. Larkin explained that they presently have a consistent configuration throughout the city. At one time, the eastern side of the city did not have a consistent configuration, but that was a good plan as well at that time, because that fit what was needed for the Edgewood Highland, Barrows, and Rhodes and at the time Norwood Avenue School before it was closed. But now they have Gladstone K and Waterman K and Barrows 6. Originally it was Barrows K and 1 being moved to Edgewood Highland; that has since changed. Things change very quickly. She asked if they really know what will really

Page 6      January 3, 2008

happen when the plan is rolled out in the summer. Mr. Bowling added that tonight he received a few more pieces of news regarding the changes in portables adding portables to Arlington and Waterman.

**There is not enough planning to warrant supporting this at this point.**

**Mr. Bowling referred to the injustice of busing Kindergarten students from their home school. Mrs. Larkin added that they tried to put forth plans that would deal with the overcrowding at Western Hills. This plan never went through the first mention because the opposition did not want to have an extra year of a move for 6th grade to another school for that year. However, there is an agreement that they can move Kindergarten out of the schools, and now Barrows 6th grade can spend a year after going through K through 5, and then making another move, and then making another move, and then making another move to high school.**

**With regard to portable units, Mrs. Larkin said that there is overcrowding in some elementary schools as well, and she did not know the exact numbers, but she has been inundated with numbers over the past five months. The projected population is not dropping. Some people might want the public to expect that, and that down the line there are issues with possible initiatives that people don't want to look at. It would be for pre-K classrooms and possible full day K. She asked what they would do then; move them back to the middle schools. Mr. Bowling said that to him it seemed that they weren't eliminating costs significantly when it came to the portable classrooms. They would be moving the situation from one venue to another.**

With regard to dismantling a highly acclaimed 6th grade special education inclusion model, Mrs. Larkin explained that as it is known now it is recognized as a good practice by the State of Rhode Island. Teachers work with a team, and they follow their students through all of the four subjects always being there for them. Things do have to be worked on, but this model is definitely looked at as being a very good practice. Those teachers would return to possibly an inclusion program in the elementary schools, and while people know that the elementary teachers are the hardest working and overworked at times, they will be divided up and two or three classrooms will be included in those classrooms. The middle school inclusion model will be dismantled as they know it today for the 6th graders.

With regard to a possible reduction of all aspects of middle school music programs, Mr. Bowling said that in a handout he received it said that this proposal would reduce the four band rehearsals from three periods a week to two periods a week. Another scenario said that they would be choking them down to thirty minutes a week on three days a week. That is getting to the band room, setting up their instruments, get tuned up, sit down, play for ten minutes, break down the instruments, and they are out. Instrumental classes for each grade would be eliminated. In its place would be one

combined 7th and 8th grade brass class, one combined 7th and 8th grade wood wind class, one combined 7th and 8th percussion class. These classes would have mixed ability levels, and it would be extremely difficult to offer personal instruction. Also, the jazz classes would be eliminated. The proposal for unified arts classes call for every student to get one quarter of general music, one quarter of art, two quarters of tech ed; this is a major change. Right now students take music and art for a full year. Students in band, chorus and strings will be in a general music class. These changes will totally effect the students' ability to pass the state mandated arts proficiency. Before any student sees a high school diploma, they must pass a proficiency in one of the arts which is art, music, theater, or dance. He asked how the children will be able to pass the mandated arts proficiency with one quarter of music and one quarter of art.

Mrs. Larkin commented that a lot of issues were going to come up about overcrowding because of the fact that if the 6th grade is moved back they cannot be absorbed without moving other support staff and programs out of the classrooms they are now sharing and using. This will now take pupil personnel, guidance, resource, literacy, art, and music from using their own classroom or sharing classrooms and they will be back out into the corridors, closets, and wherever they came from before. This is a big step backwards. Mr. Bowling went on to say that the displacement of art and music classes from permanent classrooms is something they enjoy at

several of the elementary schools. There will be considerable layoffs and involuntary transfers of teachers and teacher assistants in all areas.

Mrs. Larkin said that there was discussion about art and music being cut. The sub-committee talked about scheduling, and yes the teachers do have middle school language in their contracts that was negotiated when they made the move to middle school. Changes, however, can be made to that schedule as long as any changes remain within the constraints of the contract. Actually, changes have already taken place to the schedule as it needed to be tweaked.

As many people read in the paper, there have been four scenarios put forth. Scenario No. 3 was dubbed the most creative and challenging. This doesn't surprise her because this is the one that has to be negotiated, however, in Scenario No. 3, by adding the four periods of the foreign language into the schedule that is instructional time but each core subject will have less minutes. The district is in a negotiations year, and she had asked what the rush was. Scenario No. 4 doesn't require negotiations, however, last spring the Cranston School Committee voted to expand the world language program from two to four days per week for the 7th and 8th graders. In Scenario No. 4, the four world language classes will be placed in the unified arts blocks eliminating some art and music classes and eliminating Family and Consumer Science. However, she doesn't understand this connection because none of this has any bearing on whether or

not the 6th grade stays or not because the 6th grade was not going to be

Page 8      January 3, 2008

offered foreign language under that program. All academic initiatives can be implemented in the structure now existing in the middle schools.

Mr. Bowling referred to the highly performing middle schools and the successful teaming models that are operating well within the current structure. The question has to be asked why they are taking apart what is working for less than 1% of the operating budget. In their haste, he asked why they are looking at this kind of disruption and ensuing chaos which certainly cannot be good for the kids.

Mrs. Larkin went on to say that there will be considerable layoffs. There is concern regarding lack of proper certifications even if there are thirty-eight jobs here and thirty-eight jobs there; this does not always match up with certifications. They will also have to deal with involuntary transfers for teachers and teacher assistants, and there will be further disruption to the equilibrium presently experienced to Cranston Public Schools. As was stated this evening, nothing is set in stone this evening. That being said, then if problems arise along the way, she asked the School Committee that if this plan needs to be

tweaked and the plan is still a work in progress, then what would they be really agreeing to.

In closing the dissenting report, Mr. Bowling stated that he felt strongly compelled to publicly raise his voice in vehement protest against this ill-conceived, poorly planned, and highly rushed proposal. He emphasized highly rushed. He understood that this was a community, a state, and perhaps even a nation where everyone is being squeezed financially, but he also believed that people are smarter than administration gives them credit for. For the administration to have the audacity to try to cure the school department's budget woes on the backs of the children in the middle school and the teachers and the teacher assistants who serve these kids daily, is an outrage, and professionally and morally unconscionable. He asked where the real plan was and what were the hidden agendas at play here. It seems like a smoke and mirrors shell game that is being perpetrated on the kids in this community. He asked why this is such a rushed fiasco. These questions have been posed and continue to go unanswered and evaded. He strongly encouraged the School Committee to look thoroughly at what is really being done with this plan. They hear the motive being touted by the administration as economics over academics. He asked how many of them have spent a considerable amount of time in the middle school and elementary school environment and can speak thoughtfully and accurately as to the difference between the two. He asked them if they really knew what they were truly considering denying these

children. He challenged them all to question what the motives are under the motives. He asked what the bigger plan is. He asked why there has been so little information disseminated so slowly. If they think this is not a huge decision for kids, he cautioned them to think again. Listen to the children who have experienced what they are offered daily. Hear the experience they receive daily as true middle school students. Speak to your constituents who have dinner with their dinner at night and

Page 9      January 3, 2008

discuss what they did in school today. Please do not be hoodwinked or bullied into going along with the way it looks like it is going to go because they will have to stand apart from the rest. He told the committee members that they represent their wards as member of this committee so he challenged them to follow the desires of their people as true representatives of this democracy we call home. If they listen to them tonight, he believed the message will be loud and clear—stop this train wreck before it does more damage than they can repair.

Chairman Traficante stated that two of the three parents on the sub-committee voted against this proposal. They would now present a minority report. Their names are Mr. Michael Stanton and Mrs. Barbara Gordon.

**Mrs. Gordon stated that both the sub-committee and the School Committee really welcomed their presenting the minority report, and they appreciated that they recognized the importance of having more openness in the process.**

**Mrs. Gordon and Mr. Stanton made a power point presentation. A copy of this presentation is attached for the record as well as a copy of their minority report.**

**Superintendent Scherza addressed the public and the committee and thanked everyone for caring enough to be here. Whether they agree with each other and any of them, he thanked them for taking the time to be here. He knew their hearts were in the right place. He stated further, that he like many of them, has heard certain parts of these things for the first time tonight. He purposefully has stayed out of it trying to be objective, although in the last day or so, he had been briefed on the four scenarios. He has tried not to choreograph everything. He is trying to be objective. Although they will vacillate back and forth between now and January 14th when the final vote may be taken, on the basis of what he has heard tonight he wished to share his feelings with everyone. Superintendent's Scherza's comments are attached for the record.**

**Mr. Scherza asked the three middle school principals to give their perspective on this issue.**

**Mr. Thomas Barbieri, Principal of Bain Middle School, stated that during financially difficult times hard decisions need to be made. The Middle School Sub-Committee made a recommendation for the 6th graders to be housed in the elementary schools. This will create the following for Bain Middle School: (a) a smaller school community; (b) students will be able to go deeper into their knowledge of world language and technology to increase their success at the high school level; (c) the physical plant will be upgraded such as restoring science classrooms, refurbishing bathrooms, and replacing windows; (d) students will no longer be housed in portable classrooms. Once more, these are hard times, and Bain recognizes the need to restructure. Bain is a**

**Page 10      January 3, 2008**

**great place, and it will forge ahead to work to maintain their high performing status while striving the prestigious title of Regents Commended.**

**Mrs. Norma Cole, Principal of Western Hills Middle School, stated that she wanted to talk with her heart and her head. She was part of the original Middle School Reform Committee a couple of years ago, and she was the elementary school representative. It was at that time that she fell in love with the whole middle school concept. It was working with the people on that committee that made her fall in love with the**

whole idea of it, so here she is at Western Hills. A lot has been said tonight about the pros and cons of where 6th graders should be housed, and she really believed that to get to true depth of knowledge is through inquiry. As she is listening to all of this and thinking about the hard decisions that need to be made, she has three questions. The first question is primarily to parents, teachers and administrators. She knows that the School Committee and central office knows the answer to this question, but this the question is, do we truly as a community, all of us here, understand the significance of the budget crisis that we have here in Cranston and how that is going to affect the students, the children in this community? She knows that the School Committee has the answer to that and central office does as well; but she has the luxury of being a building administrator and working with wonderful teachers, phenomenal students, and great parents. She gets to put that on hold and spend time in classrooms. But truly there is the perfect storm on the state level, the national level, and on the district level when difficult decisions are going to have to be made. Her second question is how do we continue to address the improvement of student learning and achievement in Cranston using the resources that we have? How are we going to do that? Her question is, will we continue to collaborate as a complete learning community? She truly meant collaboration, School Committee, teachers, administrators, parents, to keep up problem solving and planning about the students, the kids of Cranston and not about the adults. She is committed here to do whatever needs to be done to keep her eye on the prize, and that is

the students of Cranston, the students of Western Hills Middle School, and what is best for them. She asked everyone to do the same.

Mr. Jay DeCristofaro, Principal of Park View Middle School, indicated that he was a member of the sub-committee that met over the course of time starting in August and culminating in December. During the five months of sub-committee meetings, they discussed a variety of issues and concerns surrounding the question of grade restructuring.

Everyone has heard all of the concerns tonight, and he and everyone else heard them during all those months, and they certainly need to be considered. This is a difficult decision. The most compelling and the basis of which he voted to send this proposal to this body is the stock reality of the ongoing fiscal challenges brought about by the city and state funding cuts. This issue must be faced now and for years to come. Grade restructuring offers them the opportunity to do so while maintaining a high level of education for the students. In addition, if he may speak somewhat provincially, the capital improvements that Mr. Traficante outlined earlier including new windows,

Page 11      January 3, 2008

heating systems, science rooms, art rooms, and updated library facilities at Park View are long over due and will have both a direct and indirect positive impact on the education experience of the

students. Depending upon which room one goes in, it is 110 degrees or 40 degrees in some of the classrooms. A 7/8 grade configuration would allow them to avoid using converted bus space as classrooms, avoid having to share classrooms, reduce lunch lines, and remove the necessity of using closets and partition rooms for some of their classes. Having said this, during the course of his time serving on the sub-committee, he had to contemplate as the rest of the members did, the potential impact on the most important resource the city possesses, the children. During the course of their deliberation, one thing became clear that there is no definitive research at this point that shows that 6th graders are better served in the elementary setting or the middle school setting. The research does show convincingly that while there are a number of influences that determine the performance levels of the students the number one factor is the quality of instruction delivered by the classroom teacher on a day-to-day basis whether it be in an elementary school, a middle school, or a one-room schoolhouse.

Mr. DeCristofaro went on to say that back in 1995 he was a 6th grade teacher. He was in his second year of teaching at Garden City School. As a retrained adult, he knew that he had found his niche as an elementary teacher, and he was extremely happy. However, due to his low seniority, he was involuntarily transferred to the middle school when the district moved to the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade model in 1995. He took no additional course work in the core content areas yet he was immediately endorsed to teach up to grade 8. Not only did he

adjust but also he came to love his job at Western Hills Middle School. His point is that his focus and commitment during all of that was on doing his very best for the students in front of him every day. He could say without reservation that if next year's 6th graders are fortunate enough to have any of the teachers that he has been able to work with during his career, they will be in excellent hands no matter where they are housed.

Chairman Traficante called a recess at 9:06 p.m.

Chairman Traficante reconvened the meeting at 9:16 p.m. He indicated that a few children wished to speak first before the adults.

Rachel Moore, 40 Glen Avenue and Clare Ramirez Raftree, 43 Harding Avenue – These two students wrote the following essay together: As we stepped onto the concrete awaiting for those big blue doors to open, in all of our minds we thought, "Whoa, that is one big school, I am gong to get lost a bazillion times." The older students swarmed around the doors like moths on a light bulb. The sixth graders talked quietly waiting for the doors to open. We all thought that we weren't going to have fun...we just wanted to go back to our old schools, but the teachers, opportunities, and just well everything proved us wrong. The doors opened and we flew into the

auditorium and sat down. The teachers called our names off like Dumbledore in Harry Potter. We nervously followed our new teachers to our homerooms. Everything was scary at first, but we got used to it. As the days turned into weeks, we were enjoying our new school. It was better than sitting in a classroom for five hours straight, like last year. Now we could have freedom. We walk the hallways every forty-two minutes, enjoying our liberty to talk in the halls. Not only can we do that but we can have Art, Band, Strings, Technology, Gym, World Language, Music, and Life Skills. Not only that but our school had awesome after school activities like Page by Page, NEED, Cooking, Crafts, Robotics, Homework Club, Student Council, Learn to Knit, Drama, Age of Empires and many more. We enjoy these activities very much and would hate to lose them because of the sixth grade moving back. Without the sixth grade in the middle schools, our wonderful team teachers would vanish. Our future depends on them. No education means no job. Without the sixth graders, we wouldn't have anything, our awesome math teacher, Mrs. Spaziano, who teaches us angles, our encouraging Science teacher, Mr. Sheridan, our exhilarating English teacher, Ms. Ziegelmayer and our exciting Social Studies teacher, Ms Alexion. If this new rule came true all of the teachers would be fighting over jobs which they wouldn't have lost in the first place. What if the fifth graders now were us, we would lose all the fun at Park View Middle School.

Barbara Hill, 19 Bradford Road, Park View Middle School Student – She stated that she remembered the first time she was in the

**auditorium; she was really nervous. She remembered that she played basketball there, and she remembered it being a very big school, and she was nervous that she was going to get lost. She was wandering in the halls wondering where she was supposed to go next. When she heard her name called, she was disappointed that she wasn't on the team with all her friends. After awhile she got her schedule and didn't feel nervous any more. She knew exactly what she was going to do, when to do it, and where to go. She has friends in 5th grade who are very excited about going to Park View, and if they don't get to go there, they will be disappointed and so will she. She knows that Park View is a really good school.**

**Audrey Guttin, 16 High Gate Road – Program Supervisor for Family & Consumer Science – Mrs. Guttin read the following statement: One does not need to look very far to realize the ills of our society and the areas of our lives that most often bring us heartache. Family problems, divorce, violence, financial or consumer related problems, health problems related to poor nutrition, challenges in understanding and raising our children and a generally stressed lifestyle, filled with time and resource management problems, are much too common to us all. This is exactly what Family and Consumer Sciences addresses. While it is easy to recognize the importance of literacy and math skills for future success (which by the way have always been incorporated into Family and Consumer Sciences as applied knowledge), too often we do not recognize the importance that positive human relationships, good nutrition and a**

**balanced lifestyle play in the ability of students to come to school ready to learn and enter the “adult”**

**Page 13      January 3, 2008**

**world ready to raise strong families and fulfill their role as productive citizens. While we spend enormous amounts of taxpayer dollars attempting to deal with these challenges, we often overlook the importance of prevention.**

**Family and Consumer Sciences is the discipline to fill that void, yet it is now being viewed in our middle schools as outdated and unnecessary for all students. Some regard it as “common sense” that any intelligent student can master alone. Yet, we know that these problems have no barriers. Rich or poor, male or female, gifted or challenged, Republican or Democrat, black or white, religious or not...we all experience the heartache. And we know there is knowledge, and there are skills, and habits of the mind that we teach to make a difference! It is not just common sense!**

**Family and Consumer Science has had a long history of helping students attain the knowledge and skills needed to meet the challenges of their contemporary society. In the sixties, mothers needed sewing skills to produce clothing for their family. In 2008, family members need shopping and consumer skills to purchase...sometimes on the internet...and maintain their clothing**

while knowing their consumer rights and how to protect their credit identities. In 2008, students need to know every day healthy nutrition practices including how to order best from fast-food restaurants. With overweight kids becoming obese unhealthy adults, nutrition education is more important than ever before! In the U.S., 19% of kids between the ages of 6 and 11 are over weight. And being over weight or obese puts you at risk of heart disease, diabetes, cancer and other ills.

I have served on the Nutrition and Wellness Coalition for the City of Cranston for almost 5 years. At the present time, we are in stage 2 of writing a grant for \$300,000 to Tufts University to improve the nutrition of Cranston Public Schools' children. Yet, isn't it ironic that at this time Cranston Public Schools is seeking to eliminate the one course that has consistently through the years educated our students in good nutrition practices.

Funding cuts cannot deprive our students of the life skills that they so desperately need. There should not be a price tag on this area of education. "Life Skills" are not being passed on !!! If we no longer offer Family and Consumer Sciences to middle schoolers, students and families will be left with a gap of knowledge needed for life.

Outdated and unnecessary skills taught in Family and Consumer Sciences...I think not! I urge you to reconsider the elimination of Family and Consumer Sciences in our middle schools. Our students

**need choices at this exploratory level to be able to have the opportunity to explore the many careers that our program highlights. Keep our programs alive. Effective skills for productive healthy living are not a frill! Remember Family and Consumer Sciences is where academics meet real life.**

**Page 14      January 3, 2008**

**As Confucius taught us, “What I hear I forget, What I see, I remember, What I do, I understand.”**

**Joanne Spaziano, 20 Boxwood Avenue – She is a math teacher at Park View Middle School. Mrs. Spaziano read the following statement: I would like to talk about the movement of sixth grade back to the elementary setting. As a parent, a taxpayer, and a teacher, I am against this proposal. How can one teacher do what we can do as a team to benefit our children?**

**My husband and I chose Cranston as the place to live and raise our children. We chose this city as my husband is a graduate of the Cranston school system and he felt it would be good for our children.**

**I have not been disappointed. My children attended Waterman, Park View, and Cranston East. Two of my children are in college. My son is currently a sophomore at East. While my daughters were at Waterman, it was ranked 8th in the state. Park View is currently**

ranked as high performing.

Speaking as a parent, all three of my children went to Park View Middle. As sixth graders two of my children flew right through and thoroughly enjoyed all three years. One of my children was quite out of sorts for a while. She was very upset that she could not open her locker fast enough and that she would be late for homeroom. She worried that she would not find her way around the school. She often left her books at school and arrived home without her materials to do her work. Then in mid October things turned around for her. She really enjoyed changing classes and being with different teachers during the day. She definitely benefited from moving every 45 minutes instead of sitting in one class all day long. She also benefited from meeting new friends from many different schools. The best part was she was able to participate in sports and academics after school.

If sixth grade is moved back to the elementary setting sixth graders will lose these benefits. This is the socialization that is so important for middle school age children. We know that at this age kids seek out their peers and make connections that sometimes last for a lifetime. My children have benefited from this exposure and participation afforded to them.

Speaking as a teacher, I am currently part of a team of sixth grade teachers on an inclusion team. An inclusion team works with a special education teacher, and a teaching assistant to service a group of students who require modifications in order to learn the curriculum

that has been established as well as helping them with socialization, organization, and appropriate communication skills. These students benefit from being one of the team members, one of the group. They are not stigmatized by being pulled out to be serviced outside of the classroom setting. They are followed closely by our team of teachers so that they can achieve success. Several of our students have a great deal of difficulty attending for long periods of time. Allowing these children to move every 45 minutes is a big benefit for them. Please allow future sixth graders with special needs to fully blossom and to experience the

Page 15      January 3, 2008

success that comes with a new nurturing environment. Our team is welcoming, caring and responsive to parents. As a group, the team talks on a daily basis to meet the needs of all of our students. The five teachers on the team share the responsibilities of maintaining contact with parents, monitoring grades and behaviors, coordinating curriculum, as well as reaching out to students to provide for special needs in extreme

situations. We help them make the transition and provide the support and guidance necessary to help them adjust to the demands and joys of middle school. As a team we have had the opportunity to impact the lives of hundreds of children both in the classroom and as advisors. How can one teacher do what we can do as a team to benefit our children?

**Speaking as a taxpayer, I have looked at this proposal and I am not convinced that there is any educational justification for it.**

**I understand that this proposal is about saving money, not what is best for our children. This proposal is short sighted. I am concerned about the impact on the performance levels of our schools. In the middle schools, academic teams are composed of specialists in their subject area. How can one teacher do what five specialists can do as a team to benefit our children? How will moving children back to one teacher affect our scores? With the proposed changes, test scores will plummet and take our property values with them. Don't make a rash decision for a small percentage of savings. This would be short sighted. As a taxpayer, my children benefited from a first class education in the Cranston Public Schools. My neighbor's children should also have the same opportunity. All three middle schools are high performing and our property values are also high. Do we really want to see that change? One teacher cannot do what we can do as a team to benefit our children.**

**Linda Raftree, 43 Harding Avenue – She stated that she had not followed any of this process; she came to the meeting to support her daughter who spoke. She works at a non-profit agency, and they work a lot with education and developing countries, so she is not a stranger to looking at funding looking at plans, looking at how to overcome severe budget difficulties that are much more severe than**

**Cranston has. They try to create a good environment for children in those environments where funding is severely lacking. One of the things that struck her was that she was not convinced that she was convinced that there is a huge problem. But she wasn't convinced by the solution that has come up for the problem. She has seen her daughter go from being an excellent student, A's and B's at Rhodes with excellent teachers to going to an environment where she has come home with five A+'s. She was removed from the middle track to the high track, and she attributed this to the team teaching and the ability of the teachers to look at her from different angles to see how she is performing and put her where she needs to be. If she stayed in a 6th grade environment in an elementary environment, she would be performing at 75% of her ability. She believed that moving her to an environment in the middle school that allows her to grow is really important.**

**Page 16      January 3, 2008**

**She knows that everyone agrees that great teachers are the key element, but she also felt that there are issues of methodology and issues of opportunity that are being overlooked as well as looking at the long term. Middle school offers a better methodology for students, students like her daughter, and offers them more opportunities to grow as young people and to really mature themselves and take advantage of opportunities that are open in the middle school. She**

disagreed with the idea of keeping students in 6th grade in the elementary school. She has no vested interest; her daughter is already going to reap all the benefits of 7th and 8th grades, world language, and her son is already in high school. She felt it was important for the committee to take this into consideration.

Ashley Wheaton, 33 Regal Way – She stated that she is a senior enrolled at Cranston High School West and has attended Cranston Public Schools for twelve years. She came before the committee tonight to speak on behalf of visual arts and the art curriculum. She feels that she is very lucky to have been enrolled in a K-12 sequential program starting at the beginning of her education. During elementary school, she learned the building blocks and basic skills of art. If she had not continued her skills on a regular basis in middle school, she would not have been able to expand her knowledge and develop her skills in high skills. With these developed skills, she has had the opportunity to explore the arts in depth and create a fine art portfolio to present to and apply to colleges. Whether or not a student applies to RISD, their portfolio work is extremely beneficial. It gives students the ability to compete on a national level with students from around the country for college entry. It gives many students a cutting edge with financial aid packages to have had a visual arts portfolio developed to the full extent. The visual arts portfolio is an example of how Cranston Public Schools develops a full child. She is happy to say that she is from Cranston High School West which is part of a public school system that provides an extraordinary

opportunity for all students to excel and compete in this global society. She is proud to have had the luxury to receive these opportunities in the arts and would strongly consider the impact transitioning the elimination of the middle school position in the arts would have on a student's K-12 experience. She truly appreciates coming before the committee and the opportunity to share with them some of her accomplishments. She presented to the committee some of her art work which reflects the full development of her art skills throughout her twelve years of learning.

Brianna DiChiro, 9 Derby Lane – She stated that she is a junior at Cranston High School West. She shared with the committee some of her art work.

Carolyn Peck, Program Supervisor for Art – Mrs. Peck read the following statement: The visual arts program in the Cranston Public Schools has always been regarded as one of the best in the State of Rhode Island. The use of academic rigor and State and National Standards embedded in the program, play a significant role in educating all students as well as unleashing their creativity. Proficiency is based upon prior

Page 17      January 3, 2008

knowledge that is achieved through sequential building from Pre-kindergarten through high school. And through this depth of

**knowledge, the art program has contributed to Cranston Public Schools' high performing status.**

**Art is the heart of the core, the core of academics, the heart of everyday life experiences, and the heart of one's creativity and imagination.**

**Presently, elementary students are instructed one period per week for approximately 40 sessions. At the middle school level students are instructed twice per week, for approximately eighty sessions.**

**Most of the current proposals regarding middle school scheduling would severely compromise the quality of our art programs on all levels. In the latest "Scenario #4, middle level art instruction would be reduced to three times per week for one quarter or approximately thirty sessions, if, they are not scheduled on a Monday holiday. This results in ten fewer instruction sessions than at the elementary level. This reduction would result in a major loss of instruction, not to mention a diminished lack of content knowledge within a year and a significant loss of retention and lack of continuity between the middle school and the high school.**

**Portfolio building is and always has been an important component of the art program, but in what might be an over jealous attempt to expose middle level students to the digital portfolio process; you would be cutting the development of skills and knowledge in half. It**

**is those skills and knowledge that would be reinforced in the middle school in order to produce proficient, portfolio worthy submissions to meet the High School Graduation Proficiency Requirements. Half the knowledge gained is equal to half the success achieved.**

**Art is the heart of the core, the core of academics, the heart of everyday life experiences, and the heart of one's creativity and imagination. In making your final determinations, please do not cut this heart in half. Thank you.**

**James Flaxington, 57 Meader Street, Lincoln – He asked to speak about one area he noticed on the proposed cuts, and that area is guidance. If he read the program correctly, there are three sixth grades suggested to be moved to the elementary schools, but there would be only one call back to add to the guidance staff to support those students. In the middle schools at present, there are three counselors, one for each grade. In all of the secondary schools, except Western Hills, the student to counselor ratio for the past decade has been close to national standard which is approximately 250 students per counselor. Today his understanding is four of the schools, including Bain and Park View, that is the approximate ratio for counselor to students. At Western Hills for the past decade, the ratio has been approximately 360 to 400 per counselor. The cuts that are proposed call for reducing the Western Hills staff**

from three full time to two full time and a .4. That would still leave the Western Hills counselors with a close to 310 to 1 student ratio which is a concern to him as has the excessive ratio for the past decade. Furthermore, he doesn't quite understand how a .4 counselor would actually be brought into the system on a daily basis whether it was for

two days a week or parts of a day. That would leave those approximately 125 students at Western Hills who do not have their counselor in the building full time, perhaps not having their counselor in the building three of the five days a week. That would be a great concern to him. Those kids need to be treated fairly and equally with all the other students in the system, and he really felt that if that position were retained at Western Hills, it would put Western Hills, Bain, and Park View and the high schools on an equal footing of approximately 250 students per counselor. Kids need counseling. He doesn't think he has to advocate for that position in education today. Guidance is not what it was ten or twenty or thirty years ago. The federal government and the state both are helping to redefine what they expect guidance to be doing in schools, for our schools, and in particular for the children. Everyone can be very proud of the fact that in this state it is the City of Cranston that has led the way with guidance reform. They have been recognized nationally, and they have been used as a model for the State of Rhode Island in some of the developmental guidance work they have done. He believed that cutting guidance staff for the students not only will cut and

diminish services for those students but also it is a step backward in the program that is nationally supposed to be growing and changing and not being cut. He advocated for the students. He has done a lot of work in Cranston and other school districts on the whole issue of stress. He has given classes and PDI's to teachers, parents, and to students. One might ask what is the relationship with education and stress. It seems clear that in his years as an educator, the students who have the most trouble performing were usually students who had environmental or personal issues that took away from their ability to focus, to remember, and to understand what was taking place in front of them. Dealing with that stress and helping to learn to deal with that is not just fluff to help students feel better. It has a very direct impact on students' ability to learn in the classroom and to perform as they are expected to do and ultimately on raising test scores.

Todd Shapiro, 1 Jennifer Court – Mr. Shapiro read the following statement: I stand before you as a concerned parent and resident of the City of Cranston. I recognize the task set before you is not an easy one. I also recognize that current research is split on the issue and there is no clear cut answer and this all seems to come down to a philosophical debate and where we will save the most money. Not what is best for our children's education.

In my opinion, the survey that was sent out was nothing more than a tool to measure public opinion. How can the board send out a survey that doesn't identify the issues and layout the facts? People are left

to make a purely emotional decision. Many of the questions I had were answered tonight but I would like to have seen some of those

Page 19      January 3, 2008

reports prior to this meeting so that I could have prepared myself even more to ask different questions in my comments. It is my understanding the number one goal of moving the 6th grade back to the elementary schools is purely budgetary. However, everything I hear and read seems to mix facilities issues, curriculum issues and fiscal

issues. Why did the 6th graders need to be sent back for renovations to occur at the middle school. Why didn't repairs happen on an ongoing basis, and the schools had to get to a significant disrepair? What do these changes have to do with sacrificing the 6th graders' education? They need to mature; they need to move within the system. I have read how the school board is going to improve the curriculum for the 7th and 8th grade, but what about the 6th grade. They are going to lose all the tracking, all the periods, all the technology stuff that was made available to them at the middle school. It sounds like you are hurting the 6th grade for the sake of the 7th and 8th grade to change their curriculum. How does that send a stronger student to the high school as the Superintendent mentioned that we have to work toward higher achieving middle schools, higher achieving high schools as reported in the Providence Journal today. If you are sacrificing the 6th graders and leaving them

back in the elementary schools and, therefore, not giving them tracking and not giving them technology, ultimately what is the number one goal? Is it specifically to save money? Has there been an analysis done on the current situation? Where is that report? If so, what were the findings? The Superintendent stated in the Cranston Herald that curriculum is more important than the locale and the core content will not change. I beg to differ. I would agree that the locale and conditions are important, and the core will change the way the teachers have to teach going from a team of teachers to one teacher.

My wife and I when we received the survey at the bottom of the survey it says the Chairman of the Sub-committee specifically stated that if we wanted to talk to someone or we had concerns send an e-mail. My wife and I sent an e-mail and never heard back. I am opposed to this, and I would argue that the sub-committee has failed in its task by presenting four options instead of coming back with a specific option to solve the problem. The responsibility is to make sure that our children get the best education possible within the confines of the budget not just a well balanced education as stated in the paper.

Laurie Pettipas, 10 Ridgewood Road – Mrs. Pettipas read the following statement: I am the parent of a current 5th grader and two high school age children that attend Western Hills. Both of our children transitioned from 5th grade elementary to 6th grade middle

**school with great success. They were not only ability grouped and appropriately challenged but were also having math, science, English and social studies with a specialized teacher every day. Mr. Scherza himself listed specialized staff in his 2007-2008 budget presentation as one of the needed essentials for learning. And, I tend to agree with him on this point. We have been fortunate that all three of our children have benefited from experienced, challenging, and thorough 5th grade teachers. However, with 2 hour reading blocks, state and federal mandates, heterogeneous grouping, and**

**Page 20      January 3, 2008**

**children repeatedly out of the classroom for resource, instrument, chorus..., the truth is, our 5th graders get math, science and social studies about twice a week as I suspect most 5th graders do. How can we say this move would not negatively impact our 6th graders? If teachers were able to cover their entire year curriculum requirements in 2**

**days a week instead of 5 then why didn't they? Obviously parts of the curriculum will need to be removed.**

**In addition to benefiting in their core subjects, my older children also learned a great deal in their technology classes. Appropriately so, access to technology was yet another item listed in the presentation**

of Needed Essentials for Learning. Proficiency in this area is no longer a bonus for college or the work environment; it is a necessity if our children are going to have any success in a world that revolves around its latest gadgets. With the exception of the FAST Math program my 5th grader used, I can count on one hand the number of times my daughter has used a computer in school since beginning second grade. I am not suggesting that our school has inefficient or technologically challenged teachers, however, I do question if the issue is time, the burdens of the elementary curriculum or both. Lastly I would be remiss if I didn't speak regarding the loss of the band program for the 6th graders next year. What Mr. Fortier accomplishes with these kids in one year is beyond phenomenal. There is no comparison between what he is able to give our children and the music instruction that takes place at the elementary level.

The e-mail I received from Mr. Stycos stated that the main reason for moving the sixth grade back to the elementary level was financial. In my opinion, nothing the School Committee decides should be based "Mainly" on finances, I thought your focus was supposed to be "Mainly" academics. However, if we are going to make this about finances, then let's talk finance. The proposed savings from this move amounts to a mere 1% of the 2007-2008 budget. I looked at 10 schools listed in the 2007-2008 budget including 1 high school, 1 middle school and 8 elementary schools. I found that 95% of the budget was dedicated to contractual obligations. Of the remaining 5%, approximately 3.5% covered utilities while the remaining 1.5% in

some way or another went to the children. Therefore, one might conclude that the area that needs to be visited to address any financial concerns is the 95% bracket. I was of the understanding that these issues were typically resolved through contract negotiations many of which do not need to have any impact on our children and certain do not depend on relocating children all over the district. Let's look at bringing contracts close to the private sector.

The reality of the situation is that every year the school department is millions of dollars away from what the city proposes to give. So, although you feel you will ultimately save \$1.3 million a year if this move goes through, most likely you will still need to cut millions

Page 21      January 3, 2008

more to make ends meet each and every year. Where is the rest going to come from? The parents already supply hundreds of dollars worth of supplies every year from pens, notebooks, graphing calculators and even paper towels and Kleenex. What can we possible give up next? My thoughts are very simple. We can't afford to raise taxes every year. And, we can't afford the contracts we have agreed to in the past! If we fix

the problem instead of putting a band aid on it maybe we can triumph without compromising our 6th graders or any of our student's education.

**I have a daughter at Oak Lawn School who has not been in a school based classroom since Kindergarten. I would like to know where the 6th grade is going in that school because it is either going in a portable or squished in another open space classroom. I don't know where we are going.**

**Cheryl Glick, 29 Brookview Drive – Mrs. Glick read the following statement: I am here tonight to voice my anxieties and frustrations with the proposed decision to move the sixth grade back to the elementary schools. I can only speak from personal experience and hope to plant some seeds of doubt with a few serious questions when considering this huge transition.**

**Flash back to four years ago when my oldest daughter was about to enter Western Hills. She was the youngest in her class of approximately 50 students from one of the smaller elementary schools on the western side of Cranston, and quite apprehensive. Would she fit in at the middle school? Would her teachers actually know who she is? Would she continue to excel in her academics? Would team teaching and switching classes each period be too great of an adjustment? Would there be after-school activities for her to venture out into? These were just a few of her concerns. Well, let me inform you that it took only two weeks for her and even my husband and I to literally fall in step with the routines and requirements of middle school. Dare I say, even loving the transition more than we could have imagined. I'm certain that some of this positive**

experience could be the credit of her hard work, but even more so, accolades go out to her team of teachers and the curricula. Having each core course every day and being able to participate in the technology classes only enhanced her middle school experience and provided her throughout the next three years with the utmost preparation for high school. Fast forward to the present, my daughter is a happy, successful, and well-adjusted freshman at Cranston West.

I credit her education, the faculty, and administration at Western Hills for an abundance of this success. With all of the changes, extra assessments, and constraints placed on the elementary school teachers, I believe that the preparedness my older daughter received has been compromised for my current fifth grade daughter. We keep hearing that this is only about finances. Thousands of children will be affected academically by this proposed change, never mind the people at the helm of each classroom -- the teachers!

Page 22      January 3, 2008

After reviewing many emails by school committee members and newspaper articles, one would assume that this is a “done deal.” I cannot begin to emphasize my disappointment and concerns. I implore each of you to explore the following questions: Will the core courses of study, English, math, science, and social studies be offered daily, or at least the amount of classroom time for each area

be lengthened? Will there be team teaching going on amongst the sixth grades in all of the schools? Will there be any technology classes offered? There are many computers in our school and they are rarely used now. Most importantly, as a lifetime certified teacher in the state of Rhode Island who has taught off and on for the last 20 years in the private sector, I know that no matter where, whom, or what I teach, as long as I love what I do, the educational experience I provide is a positive one for all involved. On that note, were surveys sent to current teachers about this move? I cannot imagine teaching in the middle school for a decade to switching gears in eight months. I find it hard to believe that this same individual would be content about going to work each day in an elementary school environment to follow their mandates, from math investigations to providing less opportunities for science labs to be completed (actually in a laboratory setting as in the middle schools). Who is going to be Mr. or Ms. Happy standing in front of my sixth grader next fall? Dare I say not many!

The level of competition amongst the other school districts in this state is pretty fierce. Cranston schools have always stood out. Warwick is preparing to follow our current school model, a school district from which I am a product of. It is ironic to me that I stood here last spring against proposed changes in the ability grouping at the middle school, and as soon as that was put on a back burner, we were hit with another possible major upheaval, displacing the sixth grade. It almost appears that the current administration is

continuously looking for ways to simply change Cranston's middle school model altogether. In the year of teacher contracts coming up for negotiation, I would be very leery of serious changes. Moving sixth grade back to the elementary schools would be a grave mistake!

Not considering teacher training and satisfaction, student curricula, and parent discourse would add insult to injury! As always, I thank you for allowing the parents the time to voice our concerns. I can only hope that minds were not already made up prior to tonight's meeting.

Robin Meunier, 186 Locust Glen Drive – Mrs. Meunier read the following statement: I am writing as a parent of a 5th grade student who attend Oak Lawn School. I have concerns regarding my child's education for next year. Everyone is talking about how having the 6th graders remain in the elementary schools will save money but I do not hear anyone talking about the education that they will receive. When the children attend the middle school they will have math, English, science and history on a daily basis with teachers who are specialized in these areas teaching them. In the elementary school there is a required block of reading time set aside each day which is equivalent to 2 hours. Is this going to be required for the 6th graders as well and if so how will all the major subjects be taught at the level that they should be if the reading

block of time is to remain the same, and will the level be the same for each student? At one time we wanted to do away with the leveling and realized that this was not going to work because there are too many students that are learning at different levels and that if they were grouped together as a whole it would be unfair to all of them. Yet, if they are to remain at the elementary school this is what is going to happen. In the middle school they will be placed with peers who are at their level and they will be taught to the best of their ability and also challenged to do better. I hope you will take the time to review all the information that you have received tonight from the concerned parents before making your final decision.

**Mark Colozzi, Program Supervisor for Music -** Mr. Colozzi thanked his exceptional music staff for months of input regarding this very difficult issue that is on the table and especially for meeting over the vacation to discuss it. Mr. Colozzi read the following statement: The Cranston Public Schools music teaching staff has a number of concerns regarding the current proposal for the restructuring of the middle schools. The latest Scenario #4 would have the most negative impact by far. The academic rigor of Cranston's music program plays a significant role in educating the entire student and has undoubtedly contributed to Cranston Public Schools' high performing status. Most of the current proposals regarding middle school scheduling would severely compromise the quality of our music programs on all levels. On Scenario #4 for instrumental instruction, how will our staff effectively include students who wish to begin instrumental

instruction in the middle school with students who are already experienced on their instrument when there is only one opportunity per week for each instrumental category? Instrumental technique classes with large numbers would create an atmosphere that will severely limit student achievement. This is completely contrary to National Music Standards as outlined by the Music Educators National Conference: National Association for Music Education. The negative ripple effect on high school ensembles will be significant.

This scenario would be particularly challenging for Western Hills Middle School as there are currently two 7th/8th grade bands. If they were to be combined, there would be no space that could house the total number of students in band. Here are the current numbers as they would appear in the scenario: Percussion Class 33 students, where will the equipment come from; Woodwind Class 47 students; Brass Class 53 students for a total of 133 students.

General Music would meet 3 times per week for one quarter. The calculated loss of instruction would be equivalent to one full quarter (from the current 36 classes down to 27 classes.) Again, this would result in a major loss of instruction, not to mention an unreasonable saturation of content within a quarter. A significant loss of retention would be inevitable. This would be of particular concern in the case of students being scheduled for music in quarters more than a year apart. There would be an even more

significant lack of continuity. Furthermore, this would adversely affect student preparation for the high school music proficiency.

General music, band, strings and chorus would be far less rigorous for 6th graders in an elementary school schedule and setting. Students currently have a much higher level of expectation and opportunities in the current middle school setting. Our ensemble musicians have the benefit of playing in a large, balanced ensemble that draws from several elementary schools.

Additionally, the music curriculum would be in need of a major overhaul in order to accommodate these changes.

Since our itinerants already service 17 elementary schools in addition to Horton and Early Childhood Center, how will only 1 add back take care of the 37 additional 6th grade elementary classes that are anticipated?

There would be a lack of materials for 6th grade instruction in the elementary schools. The current curriculum for 6th grade would not be possible with ½ hour per week instruction. With limited materials on a cart there would be a simplified curriculum at best.

**If there is a loss of current music instruction rooms at the elementary schools, will there be money budgeted to purchase duplicate materials for schools with more than one floor? Instruction at schools with music on a cart is far less varied. A designated instructional space for music opens the door for a much more comprehensive musical learning experience for our children.**

**Some of the major points today:**

**Loss of commitment to the quality. It is not enough to state that we offer music. That would be just for show. (Sort of like most private schools.) Dismantling a program that is an attraction to the Cranston Public Schools which is considered the jewel of the city.**

**Proof of this is each year is that many of our students go on to major in music in colleges to prepare for diverse careers in music including teaching at such institutions such as Oberlin College of Music in Ohio; New York University; Hartt School of Music at the University of Hartford in Connecticut; University of North Texas, arguably the best jazz program in the country; Boston University; Ithaca College in New York; University of Miami, and also in addition to the excellent programs at our state schools.**

**These kids drove us crazy because of what we offer and wish to take full advantage of it. Many return to inform us how advanced they are, particularly in music theory because of the level of training they received in the Cranston Public Schools. At least ten of our staff are graduates of East and West.**

In conclusion, Cranston's music program has long had a reputation of excellence as does our entire school system. Our staff, along with many associated with the Cranston Public Schools are very concerned that the current proposals will result in an exodus of children who may well attend private schools. We have often received favorable commentary from parents and students that the deciding factor for staying in Cranston Public Schools is the varied experiences and rigor of our music program. It is our sincere hope that this will not be compromised.

Mr. Lombardi commented that he received, just as everyone else on this committee has received, numerous e-mails regarding this issue. He was one of the fortunate ones not to be part of that sub-committee so he did respond to some of the e-mails suggesting that he come to the table with a blank slate. He was not privy to all of the studies and information. He did take issue with anyone who suggested that it is a done deal here. While some of his colleagues served on that sub-committee, four of them did not vote one way or the other, and one abstained; and three were not part of that sub-committee. But as a School Committee person, he is intimately aware of the financial crisis that they face. It is \$3.8 million that they face right now for the upcoming year, and everyone has read about the settlements and the

potential settlements and potential lawsuits and all of those complex issues. He was glad that he was not part of the process on the sub-committee because he learned quite a bit tonight. What he did learn was that to be weighed against that financial issue that they face is what he describes as a human element. He is glad that the Chairperson has decided to take this to at least two meetings because he certainly needs an additional meeting to weigh all of this out. He needs to weigh up against that financial crisis that they face and this human element that has been presented to them tonight. Some of the questions he has, and he is perplexed about it is that they are not only effecting 6th grade children but also effecting children of Kindergarten age. They are effecting displacement of the future artists and musicians. The two rhetorical questions he has to resolve in his mind are if these middle schools are currently high performing, if it ain't broke, why fix it. The second rhetorical question he has if the studies are strong on both sides, how do we know which side is right. He is personally going to take the next six or seven days to read everything that has been provided to him and then some because he is really perplexed on this issue.

Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway stated that she as well did not serve on this sub-committee. However, she has two children who went all the way through the middle school, specifically Western Hills both of whom participated in band programs having come up from third grade at Hope Highlands School. Her biggest concern here, besides some of the other issues Mr. Lombardi eloquently raised, is the arts. She

knows how outstanding the program is that is offered, and she knows the overlap the students get helps them learn math and helps them excel in so many other areas besides the arts which certainly cannot be culled out as an extra or just for some kids. Her son also transitioned over to a big instrument, a tuba from a trumpet. Her children participated in

Page 26      January 3, 2008

All-State as well and are ordinary kids, and they just excelled. Her daughter still plays for the band at Cranston West so she has a very big concern about that piece because that piece she doesn't think can just be cut off. She has to stand up for the arts because it is such a big factor why she is concerned about the move. She knows a lot of people say a lot of things about the 6th grade either way, and she has her own ideas

about that, having been an experienced parent all the way through middle school. She is going to reserve issue on those issues, but her real big concern right now is the arts. That will have to be addressed in her mind as well as all the other things; she will keep an open mind.

Chairman Traficante commented that someone brought up the question as to why the committee and administration addressed the middle school situation regarding capital projects and improvements.

He explained that the district has a state mandate regarding fire code

which they are spending millions of dollars on by mandate within a five-year period of time, and for the accreditation of Cranston High School East, that is why they had to build a new addition there which is the library media center. That cost \$13 million. All the bond money, all the capital money, has been devoted to those two major projects over the past two years. The bond was passed in 2006, and that is why the middle school situation has not been addressed by this committee.

Mr. Stycos referred to Mr. Colozzi's comments where he asked how one add-back teacher in music is going to cover thirty-seven new classes, and Mr. Stycos noted that the same question could be raised about art. In response, Mr. Nero said that their day would primarily be used in the area of general music. They will get the level that they are presently getting K to 5 right now in music. There have been quite a few proposals, and some have said that they only get music thirty minutes per day three days a week, and that proposal was thirty minutes a day five a days not on three days per week. The level of music would be pretty much the same as they would for any other itinerant.

Mr. Stycos asked how many music teachers there are now at the elementary schools, and Mr. Nero responded that he didn't know. Mr. Stycos commented that it seemed that one teacher could not cover thirty-seven classes in a week. Mr. Nero responded that there are itinerant teachers right now at the elementary schools. He feels that

with one itinerant teacher, and they would not send them to thirty-seven different classrooms, and they already have itinerant music teachers at the elementary schools which can be increased which would equal the one FTE. Mr. Stycos asked for the number of current art and music teachers at the elementary schools. Mr. Colozzi stated that there are ten general music elementary teachers plus two full-time band instrumental itinerants. There are four strings specialists; two of them do all three levels, elementary, middle and high school; one does exclusively elementary and a little bit of middle school, and the other does half and half, middle school and a little elementary. There is a total of twenty-seven on staff, fifteen of which are in the secondary schools exclusively. Mr. Stycos commented that he was assuming that this

Page 27      January 3, 2008

would not affect the four strings teachers. Mr. Colozzi responded that they may be going to a different place, and they may not be teaching strings because their certifications are K through 12 all inclusive. It depends on how things get shifted around. Mr. Stycos remarked that what Mr. Nero seems to be saying is that eleven elementary music teachers would cover the K through 6 whereas now ten cover K through 5. Mr. Colozzi responded that he would find it very difficult if at all possible to do this since the 6th graders will be spread throughout the city, and one additional itinerant could not possibly cover all those schools that need to be covered that are being talked

about.

Mr. Stycos stated that he was on the sub-committee, and they never discussed the things that Mr. Colozzi talked about having to do with the instrumental classes and the jazz class. He doesn't understand it at all how this shift would mean that there would be less instrumental classes for the 7th and 8th grades. Mr. Colozzi explained that at all three middle schools there are several instrumental classes spread out throughout the day. For example, 7th grade woodwind, 7th grade brass, and in the case of Western Hills, there may be a few of those for each instrument class. Those will be done away with and lumped with the three per week. There would be one brass class, one woodwind class, and one percussion class for all 7th and 8th grades, and this would lump in students who would like to begin instruction with students who are already experienced. The classes would be excessively large, especially in the area of teaching instrumental technique. Mr. Colozzi also pointed out that the National Standards for Music Education specify specifically, as does the Cranston Public Schools' music curriculum, that the realistic classes are eight to ten students because they require so much in the way of individual instruction. Mr. Stycos asked why this would happen, and Mr. Colozzi responded that all of the remaining staff members would be required to teach general music throughout their day. What would be left are three basic instrumental classes plus two ensemble rehearsals. All of the other smaller instrumental classes would be done away with according to this scenario. Mr. Stycos stated that he

still didn't understand it. He asked Mr. Colozzi to write something down that would explain it further. He doesn't understand how those results get triggered by this change. Mr. Traficante asked Mr. Colozzi to submit the explanation in writing and submit it to the Assistant Superintendent for distribution. Mr. Colozzi explained that the jazz class was offered at Park View which was a jazz ensemble class. That would have to be done away with as a period in and of itself because there would be room for only three instrumental classes, one brass, one woodwinds, one percussion class, and then two full ensemble rehearsals for the 7th and 8th grades band or orchestra. Mr. Stycos asked if Mr. Colozzi was saying this based on Scenario 4 they are going to give the two music teachers at Park View and he would have to cover general music and after he is done covering general music, here is the number of class periods he will have left, and Mr. Colozzi responded that he was correct. Mr. Colozzi further explained that the way general music is proposed it is for one quarter only. It doesn't make music education sense to have only one quarter of instruction on an instrument and the other three

Page 28      January 3, 2008

quarters dormant or just an ensemble experience. They are all lumped into those three big classes that would be the entire year once a week, but they are excessively large.

Mr. Stycos commented that the argument was made about the special

education inclusion classes. As he understood the argument, it was now in the 6th grade that these students can move around where they have a team of teachers, four who are including rather than one classroom teacher. He asked if there is any plan to change the amount of inclusion in this proposal as opposed to the four for inclusion. Mr. Nero responded that by nature elementary is always fully included. They do not do ability groupings in elementary school. Mr. Laliberte stated that if the 6th graders are moved or keep the 6th graders at the elementary level, they would be following an elementary model of inclusion. It would not be a team approach; there would be a special educator that would be assigned to ten students over a couple of classrooms, and they would receive help from the special educator as well as the teacher assistant who would be in the general education classroom. Mr. Stycos asked if he was right that it is not the amount of inclusion that would change but the form of the inclusion, and Mr. Laliberte responded that it would be the form of inclusion that would change.

Mr. Stycos referred to teacher training and asked if administration feels the need for additional teacher training for those who would be moving from the middle school to the 6th grade, and if so, how would that be delivered. Mr. Scherza responded that Mr. Stycos was asking something that has not been decided on the model yet. There is always a need for teacher training and professional development. All of the professionals would acknowledge that. How they do that is something they would have to talk about and talk with the

professionals in the professional development area. As far as the model, one of the big problems is funding and finance. As many of the administrators and teachers know already, other than the essential required professional development, administration has frozen it. The professional development that is done in this district none of it is paid from the operating budget; they get it from grants, and what they don't get from, they just don't have. It is needed, but it is not available to the extent it is needed. He would argue that they have to talk about how they decide what is determined by the individual that he or she needs versus how much is prescriptive for their building or department. Mr. Stycos asked if it was contractual how much is needed, and Mr. Scherza said that they work with the Professional Development Office on that. Mr. Stycos asked if they would have the ability between now and September to say to those teachers who would be making the move that they would have to take a specific training program or not. Mr. Scherza responded that he could not say that they definitely would, but realistically most of the people are already certified at their appropriate levels whether it be secondary or elementary and as such wouldn't need course work to go back to be able to do it. It would be desirable to have some transition work.

**Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway referred to Scenario No. 4 with regard to the number for technology. She asked why technology is increasing proportionately when the arts are taking a hit. She indicated that this is troubling to her because it seems that they are weakening themselves in an area that will affect the best interest of the students in proficiency in one area, and yet technology is taking a big bump. Mr. Scherza explained that everyone has to realize that these are conceptual models, and the logistics are not locked in. He believed it was Mr. DeCristofaro who took great pains to say that these were only samples and logistics could be changed in terms of extra periods within a given model. What everyone is seeing is not a final copy of anything.**

**Mr. Archetto stated that this is the best of times and the worst of times, and it is the worst of times. The city has a fiscal crisis, and the state is \$450 million in the hole, and the city level funded the school district. However, he didn't think it was a done deal. He hasn't made up his mind, and he has learned a lot tonight. He was glad that everyone came out and that the presentation was made because he wasn't a member of the sub-committee. His mind is not made up, however, he asked what the alternative is. The district is in a fiscal crisis and needs \$1.3 million. This change of the 6th grade bringing it back to the elementary level will save \$1.3 million. He asked where the committee can find that money. This is something they need to discuss. He asked if the committee should present a survey to the general public and suggest a supplemental tax increase to save the**

6th grade at the middle school level. He asked if the committee should petition the City Council to address the Mayor's surplus of \$21 million; that is an alternative. Mr. Bowling and Mrs. Larkin made a very good presentation about this plan being a hasty plan without much study. He supported Mr. Lombardi's recommendation to have a further study. The committee needs to look at this before they make a judgment.

Ms. Iannazzi stated that the sub-committee did a lot of hard work, and she was very impressed by the majority and minority reports. She thanked them for taking the time to do that. She asked what format the next meeting would have. She indicated that she and Mr. Stycos had spoken informally, and they are of the opinion that there has to be some resolution as to whether this committee thinks the 6th grade should move before the committee discusses which scenario they should pursue and even with the three scenarios that recommend moving the 6th grade to elementary schools. She felt that there are things in each scenario that are troubling to the rest of this committee. For example, she knows that Mr. Stycos thinks there should be a foreign language choice; she thinks that under Scenario 4 instead of having two quarters of technology, open up one quarter to student choice and have that student pick between art, music, and technology. She thinks there are a lot of options out there. She asked what format the next meeting will take and whether or not there will be two separate resolutions for the committee to vote on.

Mr. Traficante responded that he was under the impression that the resolution will identify whether the 6th grade should be housed at the elementary level or the middle school level. That should be resolution No. 1. The scenario that the committee follows has to be presented by the school administration for the committee to digest and eventually to vote upon. The important question is whether they are housed at the elementary level or be housed at the secondary level. That question has to be addressed first.

Mrs. Greifer commented that she hoped that as many members of the committee as possible could submit questions in advance of their next meeting to the sub-committee and/or the administration so that they can have the information ahead of time in order to move the meeting along as quickly as possible without having to look things up as they go along.

Mr. Lombardi remarked that if there is any information that the committee has considered by way of documents that they deem relevant he would like to read them. He received a minority report tonight that he would like to have an opportunity to read. He sees no other way than to handle this in a two-stage process. The first issue is whether or not the committee wants to approve that move back to

the elementary schools, and then at that point deal with whatever scenario they have to deal with. He is very troubled with Scenario No. 3 that suggests that the committee may have to renegotiate contracts with members of labor. That is way out there and certainly not within the committee's immediate plans.

Mr. Stycos suggested that the committee have a resolution on the agenda that says the committee requests that the administration prepare schedule scenarios that do \_\_\_\_\_, and the committee will discuss what to put in there. Ms. Iannazzi had talked about some option in a fourth quarter rather than take extra technology take something else. Some kids are better off not taking a foreign language but something else. Other people may have other ideas that can be discussed, and the committee could ask administration to try to come up with schedules that included these changes and then react to their various scenarios. Mr. Traficante suggested that anyone who had a particular concern about a particular area submit it to the administration as soon as possible so that they can address it at that time.

Mr. Lombardi stated that included in that request that any member wants to have included or should be reading, he would like to take a look at the surveys that were handed out. Mr. Traficante remarked that Mrs. Gordon had said it previously that the surveys were not, by any stretch of the imagination, scientific. It was developed by the sub-committee. It was made clear that it was not a scientific study

**and that it would be more of an emotional reaction than anything else.**

**Page 31      January 3, 2008**

**Mr. Archetto stated that the most important thing for this committee and everyone in this room to consider is the best interest of the student. That will be his decision making.**

**Janice Ruggieri, 45 Overhill Road – She stated that she came here tonight with a lot of questions, and she feels that she is leaving here tonight with even more questions. She asked the committee to take the time. She doesn't think that eleven days is enough time for any of the committee members to make their decision to even to begin to grasp what this is. From what she understands, there are three separate issues. She felt that the first resolution should not be whether or not they move the 6th grade. It**

**should be what they can do about overcrowding in the middle schools; that seems to be the issue. She asked that they look at how many students are at Western Hills on permits and looking at redistricting some elementary schools and perhaps turning an elementary school with low population into a middle school. There is a separate issue of curriculum changes that are going to occur whether or not the 6th grade moves. She doesn't believe that this**

affects the budget. The budget itself is an issue that is ongoing. Every year it is a surprise that they have to come up with the budget. The committee should start looking at a long-term plan. There are so many things that didn't get addressed tonight. The EPIC Program was not mentioned, and she knows there are huge concerns with program if the 6th grade moves back to elementary with regard to the 1st and 2nd graders losing that program. The Investigations Math Program is a question because there is no 6th grade Investigations math. The current program includes 5th and 6th grade in the 5th grade so she doesn't know what they would do about that. These are all issues she learned tonight. She couldn't imagine how any of the committee members can really sit down and make a decision in eleven days that would affect everyone in this room. She urged every School Committee member to consider the wishes of their constituents. They were pretty evident tonight. They could tell by the reactions to some of the speakers tonight how most of the parents feel. She urged the committee to table this resolution and really look at it.

Frank Flynn, President of the Cranston Teachers' Alliance – He thanked all the members of the School Committee for having this hearing and for listening to the parents and everyone else who spoke this evening and to the members of the study committee. There are a lot of committees in Cranston, and those who serve on them know the time that people put in in this City because they care about kids, education, and teachers. That is the value of Cranston; this is the

best school community in the state, and this needs to be recognized. Everyone wouldn't be here if they didn't recognize that value of the schools and the programs. They are in a position to have this kind of dialogue and to critique other peoples' ideas in a constructive way to come up with a solution that benefits everyone is very important. He applauded the committee for allowing that opportunity.

Mr. Flynn pointed out that approximately fourteen years ago, he among many other people in the Cranston educational community, got an opportunity from Catherine Ciarlo

Page 32      January 3, 2008

to create the middle school model that worked best for these public schools. It was a huge undertaking and took over two years. There was Catherine's traveling salvation show that went out to all the schools. It was a huge job, and they explored every aspect of what a good middle school might be. It included scheduling, programming, busing, staffing, teacher certification, reassignments, configurations, teaming, just to name a few. It took two years to study it and one year to implement it plus some people still had an opportunity to get certified to retain their jobs beyond that initial year of implementation.

Fourteen years later, they are trying to squeeze into five months what it took two years to create that many years ago, and it doesn't make sense. This is

about what can improve middle schools, and all of the dialogue about

moving the 6th grade has not addressed that in any way, shape, or form. The last speaker said it very well. Everyone needs to look at the whole process and that it is about improvement that they need to do for the students. On December 31st, Superintendent Scherza had a quote in the Providence Journal that the intent is sending a stronger student to the high school, and Mr. Flynn said that he agrees with that. They need to look at ways to send a stronger student to the high school, but whether they keep the 6th graders in the middle schools or send them back to the elementary schools is not going to address that in any way, shape or form. It is not a part of the discussion in any way. All three of the middle schools are high performing, and everyone should be proud of that. But, no one should rest their laurels on that. They need to find ways to make them even stronger and to do what they need to do to help those students achieve even greater success in the schools. Part of the reason that Cranston is so good is because of all the extra programs and opportunities afforded to the students. The foreign language piece is a real dilemma for the committee, and he understands that they need to look at increasing the regular world language in the schools, and they have had some criticism about the past model that was implemented. They need to look at scheduling and programming to readjust it when necessary. That is not appropriate for every student. At times, there should be other choices for those students as Mr. Stycos had mentioned earlier. 54% of the high school students are currently enrolled in world language classes. Under this model, they are interested in enrolling 90% of the middle school students. If

the majority of those students are not going to take world language when they get to high school, why are they being forced into classes where they would benefit by taking something else. This is something that needs to be studied. He asked the committee to take a step backwards and take a deep breath to look at this more closely. Let's not rush into something and make a mistake that may be regretted later.

Matt Sheridan, Teacher at Park View Middle School, 32 Marion Avenue – He referred to an article in the Cranston Herald today, “Deal on Concrete Plant is a Small Price to Pay”. At the Mayor’s press conference he said, “It is a small price to pay to protect the health and quality of the life of the people in Cranston.” It is \$1.9 million. Under Article VII of the contract that the committee negotiated and ratified on behalf of the taxpayers and students of this city, it states that, “The Parties to this Agreement recognize the Committee’s exclusive authority to select and employ new professional

Page 33      January 3, 2008

personnel. In keeping with the high standards of the community, the parties agree to make a good faith effort to attract teachers who possess high qualifications, and to keep such teachers in the Cranston Public Schools.” He asked if the committee would keep their promise and act in good faith. Everyone is here now for the kids; the teachers take their responsibility very seriously. He can

give the committee many examples, but he was going to give everyone one reason the committee would not keep their promise because they would be doing a disservice to the kids to whom they made a promise. Her name is Sarah Zieglemayer who is an English teacher on his team. She is one who is secondary certified with a middle school endorsement in English; the one who has read the 2,000 plus books in her classroom; the one who has kids in the Readers Writers Notebook who can elicit each individual's craft of writing by allowing them to express themselves. There are many in her position who are not elementary certified and may be out of a job.

The committee knows how the middle school certification was achieved back then, and it was just two classes. Today with the "I" Plan and his middle school endorsement, he had to have thirty credits before he was certified in his core subject that he teaches and everyone else teaches. They had to have continuing education credits in that subject every five years. He said that he has not read 2,000 books. The teachers take their responsibility very seriously. Whatever decision the committee makes, if he ends up in the elementary schools and he is certified, he will make every effort. He is math and science certified, and there will be a bump across the city on what they won't get because he has not read those 2,000 books. He does not have the craft that a Sarah Zieglemayer has. No one talks about the loss of Sarah Zieglemayer and there are others. The teachers are keeping their end of the promise, but if the committee votes for this move and are not acting in good faith, a promise they said they would keep according to the agreement—the Mayor kept his

**promise for a small price of \$1.9 million –keeping their promise is an even smaller price than the price the kids are going to have to pay in the future. He asked the committee to ask themselves if they will act in good faith – the Mayor did.**

**Karen Carnevale, 14 Sagamore Road – She is an elementary school counselor and a former Park View Middle School science teacher. Ms. Carnevale read the following statement: As a school counselor and an educator, I am very concerned about the developmental needs of our 6th graders. These students are experiencing a lot of changes as they exert their independence, cope with peer pressure, deal with their emerging sexuality and other risk-taking behaviors.**

**Whether you decide to return 6th graders to the elementary schools or continue with a 6th-8th grade middle school model, please provide our students with the support personnel they need to be successful.**

**The School Committee is aware of the need for the guidance curriculum. 6th graders have been provided with one counselor at each middle school. This has given 6th**

**Page 34      January 3, 2008**

**graders a student counselor ratio of approximately 300 to 1 versus a 500 to 1 ratio currently at the elementary schools.**

**It does not make sense to eliminate the 6th grade counselors and assign only one counselor to meet the needs of all 837 6th graders in the City of Cranston.**

**Sixth grade students deserve the benefits of participating in a comprehensive guidance program no matter what level school they attend. This is a fact supported by research.**

**Everyone knows prevention makes sense. We have our own evidence based on practices right here in Cranston. At Stadium and Gladstone Street Schools, counselors contributed to the academic success of students using a research based student success skills program. Test scores increased.**

**At Western Hills Middle School, counselors work with small groups to improve report card grades and keep students from repeating.**

**Counselors are contributing to school climate and reducing student disciplinary problems. We have bullying data collected at Park View Middle School and the CSCOR report from UMass Amherst. Our K-5 Bullying Prevention program has shown statistically significant effectiveness.**

**6th grade students have needs. School counselors help students overcome problems that interfere with their learning. We cannot afford to ignore the developmental concerns of 6th graders without a**

**direct negative impact on student achievement and test scores.**

**Please remember the developmental needs of our 6th graders and provide them with the school counselors to assure their success. Thank you for your time and attention.**

**Mark Gauvin, 175 Holland Street – He is a senior at Cranston West. He stated that after passing through Stone Hill School and Western Hills Middle School and while finishing his last year at Cranston West, the experience he has had with this curriculum has been a great influence on the path he now chooses to go on in college. However, the music program has particularly taught him the necessary values such as determination, giving everything 110%, self-discipline, to name a few. The incentive of the grades currently allows 6th grade musicians to get their first real foundation in music in band with approximately 80 members coming together for the first time. While in 4th and 5th grades, it is a crucial time to learn the basics of music performance factors such as time constraints, the quantity of the students in the program at this level, and the challenge of getting students to discipline themselves and to practice make it difficult. If the 6th grade should be brought to the elementary school, the students will have a full year of stagnant learning in a place of what was once the building blocks of music. The crucial year where students would learn discipline and the team work it takes to be in**

the music program would not be available until 7th grade. This in turn would cause a domino effect into the high school level. Curriculum may be watered down, and students would not be able to handle the rigorous and demanding standards as they do now. For example, in music theory, the class generally strives to learn the rules and techniques of music composition. The curriculum will require editing to the point where the basics of music which should be covered more gives the students less experience in the field. He has had experience in the various areas of music department in Cranston.

He has been a part of the symphonic band, Chamber choir, and music theory offered at

West. He has made All State several times and has been involved with the marching and jazz bands. After reflecting upon his years in the Cranston School System he can safely say that had his experience been any different he would not felt half as prepared for college as he does now. He is speaking for many others who feel the same way. Changing the grade system so that 6th graders are a part of the elementary schools will not affect him because these are his final months at the school, but the impact it will have on current and future students is more than enough reason not to carry through with the proposition.

Paul Phillips, Director of Orchestras and Chamber Music, Brown University Orchestra – 79 Wheeler Avenue – He has one daughter graduating who is a senior at Cranston East and another daughter

who is in 3rd grade at Edgewood Highlands School. He stated that he has been listening to all this talk about music tonight. The music program here is quite extraordinary, and it is the reason he pulled his older daughter out of Lincoln School in Providence and put her back in Cranston Public Schools in 6th grade. She has been a very active participant in that program and has worked closely with Bob Hassan and Mark Colozzi who does a sensational job. He has heard the choral groups year after year. He knows for her and for so many students that program is so important. He didn't want to get into any of the details. He feels that proposal No. 4 which has the quarter system and a couple of quarters with no music seems terrible to him. Some may not know that on today's Providence Journal front page there was a story about the boy from Barrington who is on trial, and there are so many problems everyone is reading about in Barrington. Barrington recently called Mr. Colozzi, and his daughter and another member of the band, and asked them to come to Barrington to talk to them about the music program in Cranston because they want to imitate it in Barrington because they see it as a way to solve some of the social problems they are dealing with. He would hate to see anything happen to Cranston to weaken that wonderful program here that a community like Barrington sees as a model that they should be copying. Please don't do anything that would weaken the arts in the schools; it would be a terrible mistake.

Jacqueline White, 36 Wain Street, former Chair of the Cranston School Committee – She stated that several years ago she was sitting

where the present committee is now making the decision to go the other way to bring the 6th graders up. It was a big decision; it took one vote for her to say no; come back with some more information; and

Page 36      January 3, 2008

then it took 1-1/2 years later for her to say yes after she got the information. Tonight the committee is not prepared. Administration cannot answer the questions. The committee is nowhere near ready to make any kind of a decision. This is a major major move in this city. They could ruin the Cranston School Department in one vote because they are making it too hastily. She was not going to tell them not to do it. She doesn't know, but she knows one thing; this information is not accurate. For example, administration is saying they can save \$1 million. Very quickly looking for it, she asked where the expense is for the busing that is going to be created with these students all

over the city. That is just one expense. Also, there could possibly be a family with three elementary school children going to three different elementary schools in the city – one in Kindergarten, one in 6th grade, and one at the middle grades. There would be three different bus schedules and three different schools. She wouldn't want her kids in three different schools in the elementary level. That could be a possible scenario with what is being proposed tonight. There are so many flaws to these proposals, the committee has to get more

information. They won't be ready in two weeks. The administration won't be able to provide the committee with enough information to digest and to make a good decision. Put it aside; it won't happen this year and it shouldn't; the committee is not ready. If it is for the money, and she has sat there year after year looking for money, this is supposedly \$1 million that will be saved; call her and she will show them how to save the \$1 million. There are other ways that they can come very close to saving the \$1 million rather than hurting the kids, and this is hurting the kids. The classroom sizes right now are very large in most of the elementary schools so the committee would be bringing those sixth graders back that are use to working with teams and team teaching to come into a classroom with approximately twenty-five to twenty-eight students; and they will be back into the elementary level again. This teacher will also have students who have problems working in those large classroom numbers trying to give them the same type of education; it is not going to happen. They are not going to get anything near what they are getting now at the middle school level. Let's be realistic and honest. The committee heard person after person speak that the programs will be hurt, but all the students are going to be hurt – all the 6th graders and the elementary kids. She has a daughter who is a teacher, and the administration said there are two classrooms at Stadium School. The only two classrooms she can think of are the two special education classes. She asked where those kids would go because those are the only two classrooms that would be available. She asked if those troubled students would be moved into the regular classrooms now

creating the twenty-five students and some very troubled students with one special education teacher who would be running from classroom to classroom because she already does it now for those students who are included. This has not been thought out. The administration can't answer the simple questions that Mr. Stycos asked tonight. She asked how the School Committee members could make this decision. She was very disappointed to read in today's Cranston Herald that two of the members loved the No. 4 Scenario. That tells her that they already have their minds made up; she hoped that the majority of the committee members doesn't, and she hoped those two members reconsider. She

Page 37      January 3, 2008

sat on many sub-committees, and only after hearing from John Q. Public did she realize that she was making a very bad decision in some instances, and she changed her vote. She is not ashamed to say it. The committee's mentality should be for the kids. She knows they are doing it for the money, but that is not their job to do it for money. The committee is the advocates for every kid that is in this school system. She asked them to please use their heads; this is a big decision. She begged them to reconsider it; they can't do it this year.

Moved by Mrs. Greifer, seconded by Mr. Lombardi and unanimously carried that the meeting be adjourned.

**There being no further business to come before the meeting, it was adjourned at 11:10 p.m.**

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Andrea M. Iannazzi  
Clerk**

**Superintendent's Scherza's Remarks – Middle School – January 3, 2008**

**Today's Providence Journal Article on high school rankings illustrates the need to make improvements. We have to improve the CORE areas of instruction.**

**Unfortunately – unfortunate for students and unfortunate for staff – we are not living in the best of times. We have to deal with the**

**delivery of educational services within an externally pre-defined environment. The driving factor here is balancing efficiency with effectiveness. We need to deal with our realities, and not what we would like to see in a perfect world.**

**No mistake about it, our problems are as much financial as they are educational. We also know that the state has indicated we would probably be cut below this year's level in the upcoming budget. The city is capped because of the restriction of Senate Bill 3050.**

**The city is not in a position to build more schools or new schools. Even if it was, we wouldn't see any come into use within the next five to ten years because of the time it takes to get voter approval and actually construct the facilities.**

**Our need for middle school reform and high school reform has been shared publicly as well as internally for as long as I've been here. Our two high schools have now received less-than desirable rankings – as noted – today. And as I've said time and again "Cranston cannot have high performing high schools without having three great middle schools."**

**This is not only about middle schools. It is about our whole system. We have to let go of some of the past if we are going to be able to move forward because there is no way we can expect better results in the future when we're doing the same thing right now. Our test**

**scores have been telling us for the past few years that what we are doing is not working. The status quo isn't good enough.**

**From what I have seen and heard tonight, the most prudent thing to do is to recommend that the Cranston School Committee move forward with a plan that keeps the sixth grade students at the elementary school level and , if I had to finalize my recommendation at this moment it would be for Scenario #4. I Say this for a number of reasons:**

- We have to live within our resources – both physical and fiscal**
- We continually hear about the value of smaller learning environments**
- High school and Middle school reform have been mandated**
- Are schools are slipping – stagnant at best**
- We have the reality of Senate Bill 3050 and no corresponding state funding formula**
- The State is in fiscal trouble**
- Scenario #4 can be accomplished within the parameters of the existing contract**

- **Students don't lose teaching time**
- **Students would have a longer lunch time, long a source of complaint**
- **At the sixth grade literacy would be provided at least 90 minutes a day vs. the current 45 minutes. . .this would benefit all students, especially ESL and those with personal learning plans**
- **It would allow for the augmentation of mathematics conventions and a better grounding in preparation for algebra which is the crux of the high school state math text content**
- **It allows for greater personalization at both the elementary and middle school levels**
- **One of Cranston's strengths is its small neighborhood schools which support most research findings relating to learning environments**
- **Scenario #4 actually adds, not reduces, the number of middle school teachers in grades 7 and 8 by four.**
- **It's about what is best for our children**

**Of course I wish we didn't have to make this decision – it is painful - but failure to do so would not be in the best interests of the children and the taxpayers of Cranston who support the lion's share of the financial support of our schools. To anything less would be irresponsible. The easy thing would be to do nothing at all**

**For all of the reasons cited – and I could go on with a few more – I recommend that the Cranston School Committee vote to make the sixth grade a part of our elementary school structure.**

**Proposal to Move 6th Grade: Minority Report**

**Barbara Gordon**

**Michael Stanton**

**Committee Parent Representatives**

**January 3, 2008**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**This Minority Report outlines why we cannot endorse the proposal to move Cranston's sixth graders to elementary schools. While the school budget and overcrowding at Western Hills Middle School are genuine concerns, moving the sixth grade is not the way to solve them. Instead, this proposal would have negative educational consequences across the board. This is a step backwards, not forward, in improving middle-school education in Cranston. Among the reasons why we oppose it:**

- Sixth graders would receive a less challenging education, losing out on specialized instruction in key subjects like math, science and**

**technology, even though national studies say they need more intellectual stimulation at this crucial stage of their development.**

- The potential havoc this would create in our crowded elementary schools, including mixing small children with young adolescents, has received insufficient attention from the study committee.**

- Seventh and eighth graders will also suffer academically because the crucial transition years between elementary and high school will be shortened.**

- The actual financial savings are not clear, as estimates are mingled with proposed cuts in Unified Arts and other areas that aren't necessarily connected to moving the sixth grade.**

- Prospects for freeing up bond money for middle-school capital improvements are not certain in these tough economic times, and should not be linked to what's best for our children academically.**

**We urge the School Committee to reject this proposal and explore other ways to cut the budget that will be less detrimental to our children and cause less long-term harm to our school system.**

## **INTRODUCTION**

**The proposal to move the sixth grade to elementary school is not a sound one, educationally or financially. It goes against what national studies say is the best way to educate young adolescents at a critical stage in their development. It will cause tremendous disruption**

**across the city. And it's not even clear how much money it will save.**

**Furthermore, the recommendation comes out of a process that did not focus on the academic merits of moving sixth graders or the potential negative impact on Cranston's 18 elementary schools. The committee also failed to consider other alternatives to solve unrelated problems that have driven this proposal to move the sixth grade – namely the need to cut the Cranston school budget, overcrowding at one of the city's three middle schools and logistical problems in scheduling more World Language classes in the seventh and eighth grades under a new policy adopted last spring by the School Committee.**

**We recognize that budgetary constraints necessitate tough decisions, and we appreciate the difficult challenges faced by the administration and the School Committee. However, after approaching this with an open mind and carefully examining the issue over the past four months, we believe that the School Committee must explore other alternatives to cutting the budget that will have a less detrimental impact than moving the sixth grade and uprooting Cranston's educational system.**

**The study committee voted 6-4 to recommend moving the sixth grade. Two of the three parents on the committee oppose the recommendation. Three of the four School Committee members who also serve on the study committee said that they support the recommendation for economic reasons, not because they believe it is for the best academically.**

## **EDUCATIONAL CONCERNS**

### **THE MIDDLE SCHOOL MODEL IS BEST**

**Based on our research, sixth graders receive the best education in middle school, where they are a better fit academically, socially and emotionally, and where they are taught by a team of teachers in the core subjects of math, science, social studies and English.**

**The prevailing trend in education over the past two decades has been toward the middle-school model. Even recent studies that prefer a return to the K-8 model note that students from sixth (and even fifth) grade up should receive specialized instruction in core subjects and a different teaching approach than lower-grade students, in recognition of their evolving educational needs. In a 2002 speech at the White House Conference on Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers, researcher G.J. Whitehurst said that it is fairly well established that strong subject-area knowledge in teachers correlates with higher student achievement.**

**And in the critical subject of math, where American students have fallen behind those in other countries, a study for the U.S. Department of Education in 1999 concluded that students need access to higher levels of math – starting in middle school. The study found that the academic intensity and quality of high-school math curriculum was the most important factor in determining whether students went on to graduate from college. And students cannot take rigorous math in high school if they have not prepared themselves in middle school. This is echoed by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute,**

which supports K-8 schools but says that students as early as the fifth grade should start receiving “greater access to advanced courses and electives” – particularly in math, where it is important in the middle educational years to build a bridge to high school and college.

If Cranston moves the sixth grade back to elementary school, students will lose out on the richer curriculum that team-teaching offers – in math and other core subjects. And they won’t be able to take technology, despite its growing importance in today’s world. We also find it troubling that the superintendent recently told the study committee that moving the sixth grade is an opportunity to eliminate tracking in the sixth grade and impose heterogeneous grouping, since elementary students are not grouped by ability. This circumvents the School Committee’s decision last spring to block the superintendent from implementing heterogeneous grouping without proper study, planning or communication. Ironically, this study committee was created to examine this very issue, but has not yet been able to because of this sixth-grade proposal.

In 1993, the Cranston School Committee voted to convert its junior-high school model of Grades 7-9 to a middle-school model of Grades 6-8, beginning in September 1995. (At the same time, the ninth grade was elevated to high school.) The decision grew out of a study committee of parents, teachers and administrators. The Cranston superintendent at the time, Edward J. Myers, said that the change was supported by a decade of national research showing that sixth graders were more suited, educationally and emotionally, to being

with older children rather than younger children. The resolution adopted by the Cranston School Committee in May 1993 noted that national studies and educational research recognized the value of the middle-school model, most notably team teaching, interdisciplinary collaborative teaching and smaller groups.

In elementary school, sixth graders spent the day in one classroom, taught by one teacher. Under the middle-school model that began in 1995, sixth graders are taught by a team of specialized teachers in the core subjects. They can take more electives, such as technology, art, band, orchestra and family & consumer science. And a collaborative team of teachers can more easily keep tabs on an individual student's development and spot and address problems.

A landmark study in the shift to the middle-school model was *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*, published in 1989 by the Carnegie Corporation's Council on Adolescent Development. The report was updated in 2000 with the publication of *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century*. The report discusses in detail the unique needs and challenges of early adolescence. For young adolescents, the bonds that they forge with teachers are crucial to learning at this stage of their lives. Because early adolescence is such a vulnerable and scary time, these relationships "strengthen and expand their capacity for learning," according to *Turning Points 2000*. The team-teaching approach not only provides deeper, curriculum-specialized learning, but also more opportunities to forge those vital learning connections. Teams "help young adolescents realize their full learning potential."

**The 1990s saw a meteoric rise in 5-8 and 6-8 middle schools across the country. In 1997, the National Middle School Association concluded that “middle-level education of the nineties is more focused on programs designed to meet the needs of young adolescents.”**

**Mr. Stanton spoke to Kenneth Sheehan, the West Warwick school superintendent. Previously, Mr. Sheehan was the principal of Gorton Junior High School in Warwick, which is currently considering a shift from K-6 to 6-8, and, before that, an active proponent of the middle-school movement in Massachusetts. He argues that sixth graders belong in middle school, emotionally and intellectually, and that they get a better education with specialized teachers in core subjects.**

**Echoes Education World: “Most educators and researchers would agree that sixth-graders are physically and psychologically closer to seventh- and eighth-graders.”**

**This leads to another concern we have with moving the sixth grade back to elementary school. An elementary teacher is more of a generalist. A middle school teacher is a specialist. But because of certification and bumping issues, we don’t know what teachers will wind up teaching our sixth graders in elementary school, their background and experience, and what core subject(s) they are strongest or weakest in. The administration has suggested that sixth grade teachers in individual elementary schools could choose to “team teach” based on their strengths, but that is totally random, based on teacher assignments. The administration acknowledges**

that there are no guarantees that this would occur. And to the degree that it would, it suggests that not all of Cranston's sixth graders would receive an equitable education.

A middle-school teacher assigned to a self-contained sixth-grade classroom and required to teach all subjects may be ill-suited to the task, by temperament and experience. For instance, Mr. Sheehan warns, a teacher weak in math might place more emphasis on other subjects, thereby short-changing students. Even a middle-school teacher who is certified to teach in elementary school may have a difficult transition. As one core-subject middle-school teacher told us, "I'm certified to teach elementary, but I haven't done it in 10 years."

More recently, some have advocated a return to K-8 schools – BUT with specialized instruction in core subjects and more electives to challenge students, starting in the fifth or sixth grade. A 2005 paper in favor of K-8 schools, by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, says that "it is imperative that students receive instruction that is rigorous and challenging" – including specialized teachers in core subjects for young adolescents.

D.L. Hough of the Institute for School Improvement found in 2004 that when adolescents at K-8 schools outperform middle-schoolers, "it is because the former are more fully implementing middle grades promising practices." And Educational Leadership in 2006 said that "rather than debate which grade configuration is best for middle grades, we would be better off expending our energy creating a curriculum that intellectually engages and inspires young adolescents."

**We fear that moving sixth graders back to elementary school and stripping away a richer curriculum will reduce, not increase, academic rigor. Sixth graders in need of greater intellectual stimulation will lose out on valuable educational opportunities at a crucial stage in their development.**

## **MOVING THE SIXTH GRADE WILL NEGATIVELY IMPACT SEVENTH AND EIGHTH GRADE EDUCATION**

**We are also concerned that moving the sixth grade will have a negative domino effect on the seventh and eighth grades. Without that third year of middle school, the crucial bridge to high school will now be just two years. The time that sixth graders spend transitioning to middle school will be shifted to seventh grade, compressing the middle-school education. A precious year of continuity will be lost.**

**It is interesting to note that Warwick is now considering the reverse of Cranston – switching from a junior-high model to a middle-school one. Ken Sheehan, who was the principal at Warwick's Gorton Junior High, said that the truncated two-year model of seventh and eighth grade is detrimental to learning because you lose the continuity of a three-year teaching block.**

**The answer to declining test scores in middle school isn't to reduce academic rigor or continuity by moving sixth graders down, but to increase rigor and continuity, not only in the sixth grade but in the grades that follow. For instance, Turning Points 2000 recommends strengthening the team approach by keeping the same**

**team of teachers with the same students for three or more years, something that is not done in Cranston. “The amount of time teachers and students are able to spend together on a team over the years can affect the quality of their experience together and the outcomes for students,” the report says.**

**We believe that these types of approaches should be considered to strengthen a young adolescent’s education, rather than the current proposal, which would weaken it. Moving sixth graders back to elementary school could also prove harmful to the seventh and eighth graders left behind.**

## **THE NEGATIVE IMPACT ON OUR ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

**Some who support putting the sixth grade back in elementary school argue that “Smaller neighborhood schools are better.” That sounds good in theory, but we fear a starker reality.**

**Imagine an influx of an estimated 835 sixth graders into Cranston’s neighborhood elementary schools this September. Those schools would become more crowded, putting a strain on educational resources. Younger children would be in close quarters with 11- and 12-year-olds. Children would be taught in portable classrooms at Arlington and Woodridge. Two other schools – Gladstone and**

**Edgewood Highland – would each add FOUR sixth grade classes. Other elementary students would be bused outside their neighborhoods. One Waterman parent told us she is upset that her daughter, who will start kindergarten in September, will have to take a bus to Garden City instead of walking two blocks to her neighborhood school.**

**Moreover, classrooms that were counted as “empty” by the administration in contemplation of this move are actually used for a variety of worthy purposes – for instruction in art and music, special needs, ELL and other programming. That space would be lost. Art and music teachers would have to teach from a cart, limiting the materials they could use and the depth of the curriculum they could offer.**

**In the case of Cranston’s music program, program supervisor Mark Colozzi writes that continuity, variety and rigor would be lost at all levels, partly as a result of moving sixth graders out of middle school and partly through staff cuts that would limit course offerings, including just one quarter of general music a year for seventh and eighth graders. This, warns Colozzi, would jeopardize student preparation for meeting their state music proficiency in high school.**

**Another reason cited in support of moving sixth graders is to shield them from the negative influence of older seventh and eighth graders. The administration cites a 2007 Duke University study of public schools in North Carolina that found sixth graders are more likely to have disciplinary problems in middle school because of their exposure to older adolescents. As a result, the study says, students**

**don't do as well academically.**

**This is an emotional issue for parents who worry about their children growing up too quickly – one that resonates with the authors of this minority report since we are both parents of seventh graders. However, the reality is that by the time today's generation of children reaches the sixth grade, they are aware of and affected by our Internet culture. It is unavoidable that they have likely heard bad language and have some awareness of sex and drugs. In fact, this makes it all the more important that they are intellectually stimulated and engaged so that they remain focused academically and better handle these outside influences.**

**This idea appears to be supported by the results of our study committee's parent survey. Most fifth-grade parents, faced with their children heading to middle school next year, favored keeping them back in elementary school. But after the transition, most parents change their mind. Most of the middle school parents told us that they had feared middle school when their children were in fifth grade, but now realize their children were ready and that the change has been beneficial.**

**A good example is Dr. Patricia Russo-Magno, the mother of a Western Hills sixth grader. She filled out the parent survey last fall and said she favored moving the sixth grade to elementary school. Now she wants to change her vote. In a recent e-mail to members of the School Committee, she wrote, "Now that myself and other parents of sixth-graders I have spoken to have had more time to judge the experience, the movement to middle school is a unanimous plus for**

our children's maturity level, responsibility, academic interest and overall sense of accomplishment." Her son "no longer has trouble paying attention in class since he is more stimulated and involved in his own educational process. In other words, these kids are ready to move on and take on more of a challenge than elementary school can offer." Furthermore, she voices concern about overcrowding at the elementary schools with the addition of sixth graders.

We also believe that Cranston's middle schools do a pretty good job of isolating the sixth graders from the seventh and eighth graders. And Jay DeCristofaro, the principal at Park View and a member of the study committee, notes that the bulk of disciplinary problems at his school occur among seventh and eighth graders – not sixth graders.

But what about disciplinary problems in the elementary schools with the influx of sixth graders? The Fordham Institute study in favor of K-8 schools says that there should, ideally, be a separate wing for the older students to avoid "unwanted contact" with the younger, more impressionable students. In a Philadelphia K-8 school examined by the Fordham Institute study, where the students were not separated, one teacher noted that the little children "pick up bad habits in the halls." Another said that they needed a separate wing and entrance for the bigger kids because they sometimes scare the littler ones, not necessarily intentionally but by "their size and level of activity." Mr. Sheehan underscores this, pointing out that there is a narrower maturity gap between a sixth grader and an eighth grader than there is between a sixth grader and a first or second grader.

**Sixth graders are at an age when they are beginning to exhibit behavior that you don't want younger children exposed to.**

**It is not practical that such separation will happen in Cranston's crowded elementary schools. Sixth graders will share hallways, lunchrooms, bathrooms, library space, buses and playgrounds with the younger students. And with Rhode Island's recent mandate to move the cutoff birth date for kindergarteners up to Sept. 1, future sixth graders will be older – up to 12 years old.**

**To prepare an elementary school to absorb older students, the Fordham study says that administrators must plan for adequate library and computer facilities and even consider the logistics of scheduling lunches and recess. None of these issues have been addressed by the Cranston study committee.**

**Furthermore, Cranston population projections forecast an increase in the elementary population and a decrease in the middle-school population over the next six years. Through the 2013-2014 school year, the number of K-5 students is expected to rise to nearly 4,900, an increase of nearly 300. Add the sixth grade, and the K-6 population would rise by nearly 100 more students, for a combined increase of nearly 400 students. During the same period, the middle-school population will decrease; in the seventh and eighth grades, there will be some 200 fewer students.**

**There is also a strong possibility in the not-too-distant future, once the current state budget crisis eases, that the State of Rhode Island will mandate full-day kindergarten and/or public preschool. Where will we put these kids? Will we have to put the entire school system**

**through another major disruption to create space? Any such changes will only exacerbate our overcrowding concerns at Cranston's elementary schools if sixth graders are added to the mix.**

## **FINANCIAL CONCERNS**

### **HOW MUCH MONEY WOULD MOVING THE SIXTH GRADE REALLY SAVE?**

**The administration presented the study committee with four scenarios for changing middle schools next year. But not all of the changes, or cost savings, are directly related to moving the sixth grade. Many of the proposed cuts and changes included in their cost-savings projections involve eliminating Unified Arts teaching positions – cuts that raise separate educational concerns - which the administration would seek regardless of where the sixth grade winds up. For instance, the administration has proposed eliminating Family & Consumer Science classes in middle school, regardless of where the sixth grade goes.**

Further complicating matters, the Unified Arts cuts are tied to a mandate by the School Committee that World Language instruction be offered four times a week, instead of twice a week – but only in seventh and eighth grade as opposed to sixth, seventh and eighth. The increased time devoted to World Language will take away from Unified Arts. This will happen regardless of where the sixth grade is.

It is hard to determine how much money would be saved just by moving the sixth grade, but it would be less than the overall totals attached to some of the administration's various scenarios. For example, under Scenario 4 favored by the administration, the school system would save about \$1.2 million. But much, if not all, of this seems to be from a reshuffling and elimination of teaching positions due to the decrease in Unified Arts necessitated by the increase in World Language instruction.

In savings tied more directly to moving the sixth grade, the administration estimates that it would save another \$363,000 by eliminating one of two assistant principals at each of Cranston's three middle schools, and another \$210,000 by eliminating a total of 2.6 guidance counselors among the three schools – a total of \$573,000. Does that amount of savings, in an overall budget of some \$120 million, justify moving the sixth grade, and the ensuing city-wide disruption of schoolchildren and negative educational impact? Couldn't some cuts be made in those areas without moving the sixth grade? The second assistant principal was only added at all three middle schools a few years ago; before that, the schools functioned with one assistant.

**In December, as the study committee neared a recommendation, the superintendent informed us that he began contemplating moving the sixth grade last spring, after encountering logistical problems in creating a new schedule incorporating the World Language changes. The administration developed a proposed schedule that it says will not work if the sixth grade remains in the middle schools. While we appreciate the challenges of scheduling, we don't believe that such a significant educational decision regarding the sixth grade should be influenced by the World Language scheduling problems. That is a separate problem that needs a separate solution.**

## **WOULD MOVING THE SIXTH GRADE REALLY FREE UP BOND MONEY FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL REPAIRS?**

**Another motivation for moving the sixth grade is to ease middle-school overcrowding, particularly at Western Hills, so that bond money allocated for middle-school repairs can be more evenly spread across the city. Otherwise, supporters argue, \$4.5 million of \$9.5 million approved by voters a few years ago for the Middle School Renovation Bond would have to be used to create new classrooms at Western Hills. And supporters say that another \$4.5 million would be needed to upgrade sixth-grade classrooms in Park View's G-Wing, which was once used for bus bays.**

**The problem, as Chairman Traficante notes, is that there is no guarantee that the City Council will authorize the expenditure of that**

money, particularly in the current city budget climate. In fact, it seems highly unlikely.

Therefore, given the practical realities that the money will be authorized only in smaller increments, we suggest that top priority be given to less-costly upgrades that the administration has put forward, such as the estimated \$1.6 million to renovate and repair antiquated science classrooms at Hugh B. Bain, Park View and Western Hills, as well as installing new boilers at Bain and Park View and new windows at all three schools. As for the use of former bus bays at Park View, as parents of students there, we have never heard any complaints from students or parents about those classrooms. In a perfect world with unlimited money, it would be nice to have refurbished classrooms. But if choices have to be made, we would choose the quality of the education that our children receive over the quality of the space in which they receive it – especially if the alternative is herding them into crowded elementary schools and limiting their academic options.

As for the overcrowding at Western Hills, although we acknowledge that the problem is real and significant we would suggest this is a separate problem that needs a separate solution, rather than disrupting the entire system. For instance, the administration's count of available elementary classrooms turned up a disproportionate number on the western side of the city. Of 41 rooms the administration lists as available, 23 are in schools that feed into Western Hills. Why not redistrict the schools just within the western side of the city to allocate those students more evenly?

**We want to emphasize that we don't see this as an Eastern Cranston versus Western Cranston issue. As noted earlier in this report, we believe that the "available" elementary classrooms across the city are put to good use now, which is why we don't believe sixth grade should be added. And children across the city will suffer the negative educational consequences. Nor is it our job, as members of this study committee, to dictate policy in other areas. We raise these possible approaches to the overcrowding issue only to illustrate our concern that other solutions to this separate problem have not been adequately explored.**

## **CONCLUSION**

**For all of the reasons outlined, we feel that moving the sixth grade to elementary school would not be in the best interest of Cranston schoolchildren.**

**During this process, whenever we asked that the study committee focus on the academic merits of such a move, we were told that there were studies on both sides, and that therefore this was really a money issue. But upon closer examination of those studies, there appears to be widespread agreement that early adolescents have unique educational needs and benefit from specialized instruction and greater stimulation. If these needs were taken into account in the administration's proposal to move the sixth grade to elementary school, we might feel comfortable endorsing it. But those needs have**

not been addressed.

Nor has there been ample deliberation about the impact on our elementary schools. Throughout this process, we have not heard from educators at our elementary schools about how this will impact their buildings and the younger students. Nor were the parents of younger elementary students included in the parent survey.

Although the administration proposed this move in August, when the study committee first met, it was not until Dec. 5 – just before we were asked to make a recommendation – that we received any detailed proposals or cost-savings estimates. And as noted above, those proposals are mingled with proposed cuts in other areas, making it difficult to clearly analyze the actual cost savings, or weigh whether it would be worth the disruption and academic losses to students.

Moreover, because of the delays and continued confusion over numbers and unrelated issues, there hasn't been sufficient time for the public to debate and digest this. With the holidays, many parents are just now becoming aware of this proposal. They may not grasp the full implications of moving the sixth grade until it is too late.

The idea of moving sixth graders is too important to be used as a solution to other problems, such as overcrowding or revising the World Language schedule. As for the very real budget concerns, while it was not this study committee's job to cut the budget, we would respectfully suggest that a wider range of other cuts that would be less educationally detrimental and have fewer long-term consequences has not been considered. We would note that this is a

**contract year for the Cranston teachers union, and that a host of other school programs and administrative positions should be looked at. In tough economic times, everything should be on the table.**

**Moving the sixth grade will short-change our children in three ways – when they first arrive in crowded and strained elementary schools, when they receive a less challenging education in the sixth grade and when they have a shorter bridge to high school in the seventh and eighth grades.**

**We urge the School Committee to reject this proposal, and find other ways to cut the budget that will be less detrimental to our children.**

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Barbara Gordon (b.gordon@cox.net)**

**Michael Stanton (m.stanton1@verizon.net)**

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